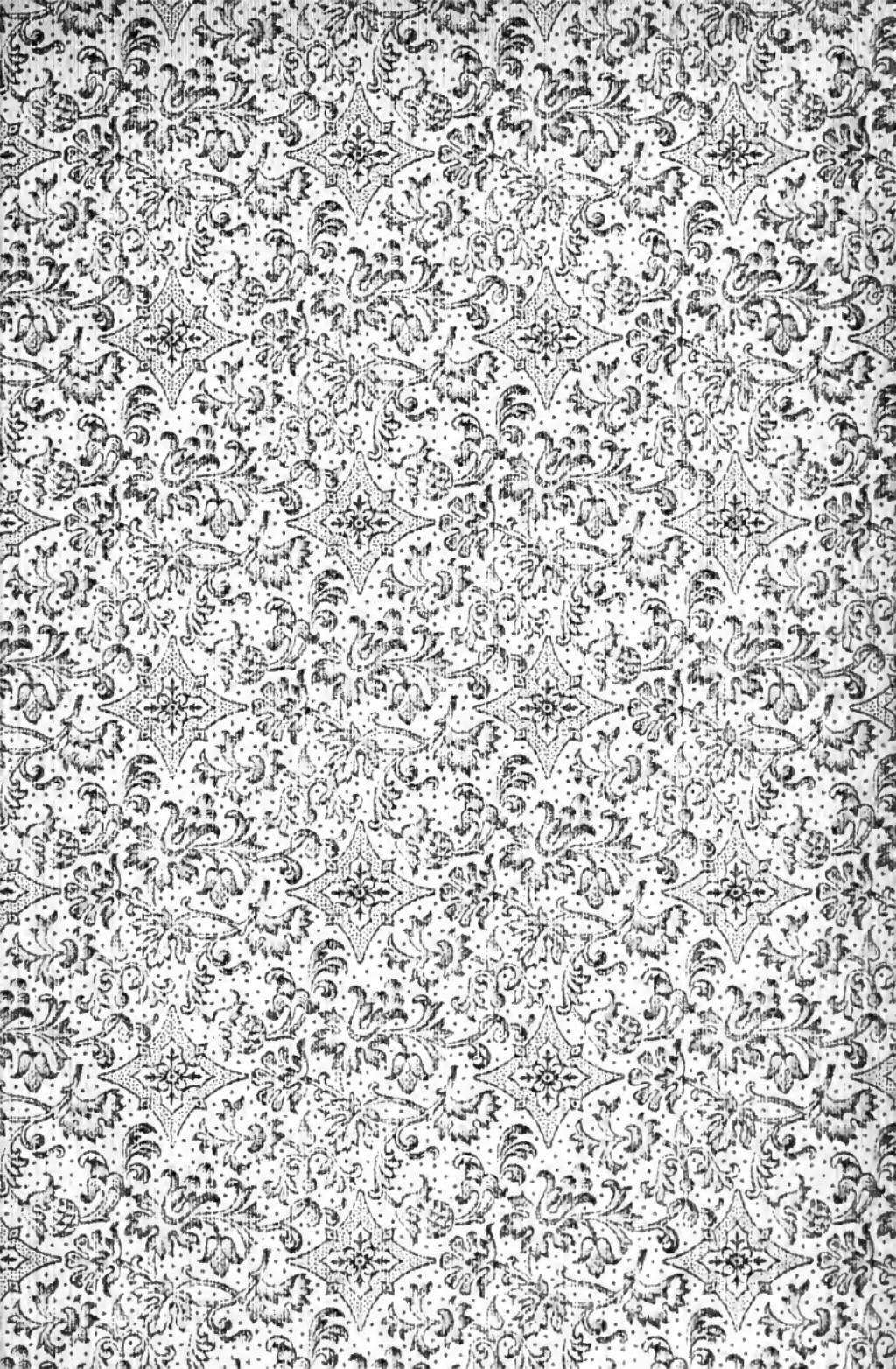


THE STORY OF A KISS







Anna

THE STORY OF A KISS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“MY INSECT QUEEN,” “A HORRID GIRL,” ETC.

“A bliss in proof—and proved, a very woe,
Before, a joy proposed—behind, a dream.”

SHAKESPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE STORY OF A KISS.

CHAPTER I.

WENDHOLM, PAST AND PRESENT.

NEVER, surely, was there so world-forgotten a place as Wendholm, in Dorsetshire. "Wendholm," interrupts some one who knows it, "is not in Dorsetshire; it is in——" Just so, my friend—I know, as well as you do, where Wendholm really is; but, by the literary fashion of the day, it is forbidden to name the English county in which the scene of a story is laid. A literary fashion may be, and often is, as silly and inconvenient as any of those

depicted in the plates of a lady's magazine, but a lowly pen-wiper like me does not disregard it. So, as I do not choose to adopt the worn-out inventions of "Clayshire," "Gravelshire," "Mudshire," and the rest, I borrow the name of a sister county, in which to disguise—since disguise is imperative—the "shire" (for it is one of the "shires") in which Wendholm is situated.

There could scarcely exist in England, though there might be in Wales or Scotland, a more world-forgotten place than Wendholm! To begin with, it was seven miles from a railway station! Think of that, O ye who consider that your fellow-creatures have cut themselves off from all intercourse with civilization—so far as you are its representatives—if they betake themselves to any habitation beyond a short walk from a first-class railway station on

a main line! Seven miles of a very rough, hilly, stony road. Nearly two hours' drive for an ordinary “four”-wheeler. And when you had reached Hanley station, it was only on a “loop” line, from which three or four trains ran daily to the little manufacturing town of Retford—Retford, which was not so far from London as you would have supposed, from the time it took to arrive there, through a perfect network of “junctions,” with their endless changes and delays.

There were no shops in Wendholm. The butcher there killed a sheep and a half a week; by which is meant that the meat consumption was at that rate, not that he killed half a sheep or half-killed one. No; Wendholm might be rural, but it was not barbarous. If its people were hungrier than usual, or desired a little variety in its diet, that butcher would, on receiving

orders, proceed to Retford by train, and return thence with the requisite portions, or as nearly as he could contrive it, of lean calf or superannuated cow. There was a baker in the village, but he did not keep a shop, having nothing to put in it. Like the butcher, he knew, almost to a loaf, what the daily demand for bread would be. He kept a boy and a basket to deliver his goods; the little cottage window of the grocer, next door to him, sufficed for the display and storage of any surplus provision, with space enough for the glass bottles of "sweeties," with which the Wendholm children tried ineffectually to poison themselves. There were also contingents to the regular food supply. A few scattered sheep farms on the hills furnished a seasonable goose occasionally. From the pasture-farms in the lowlands could sometimes be purchased a superfluous

calf, or a more frequent pig; so that Wendholm stood in no peril of gross material famine. But what of its more complex social needs? Had it no resident doctor or lawyer? If Mrs. Lomax, the miller's wife, were surprised by one of those feminine crises, of which the parish had its due proportion—rather more than its due proportion, if its (marriage) certificated matrons were alone reckoned in its maternity—was John Lomax required to walk to Retford, to take train for Hanley, to “wire” for the parish doctor, who lived ten miles further? Or if Farmer Soathson were taken suddenly ill, must his friend struggle with the same difficulties before his lawyer could be in attendance, with his still unsigned will? Not so; there were horses and riders at command for such contingencies; and though despatch was not to be expected, still the Wendholmites were

noted for longevity, and, whether it were cause or effect, they were never in a hurry.

There were three houses of pretension near Wendholm, but the actual street consisted of the cottages of the agricultural labourers employed on the few farms around it, a carpenter's workshed, a sawmill, the butcher, baker, and grocer's "stores" before spoken of, a small church, a smaller chapel, and two small public-houses ; and what more would you have ? Such was the village of Wendholm sixteen years ago ; and such it is at the present day.

The Vicarage, pretty and picturesque, was, at the time of which I write, inhabited only by an aged and infirm bachelor cleric and his young unmarried curate, who had more leisure than was good for him ; his parishioners being engaged most of their time in the fields, where their wives also found occupation, with such of their children

as were old enough to earn something by weeding, cattle-tending, or other light employment. The other two houses of any distinction in Wendholm added little to its social charm. Oakland Heights, or Oaklands, as it was oftener called, was an old-fashioned family mansion, surrounded by noble woods of oak and beech, and acres of wild sheep-grazing land, sufficient to warrant the most scrupulous estate-agent in describing it as an estate. For many years it had been shunned by tenants or purchasers, as lying under the ban of "Chancery," and when freed from that stigma it was bought "for an old song" by a maiden lady, who, from the day she entered it until the day of her death, twelve years later, had never been beheld by mortal eyes but those of her doctor (Dr. Stewart), her banker (Mr. Maitland), and three or four old servants who rarely stirred beyond

the grounds. Some said she was mad, some that she was only a dipsomaniac ; Mr. Maitland averred that she was neither. Then they whispered that she had some hideous personal deformity. "Nothing of the kind," said Dr. Stewart. Then some highly imaginative being suggested that she was performing penance for some mysterious crime committed in her youth ; and not until this charitable theory had been pretty widely disseminated did Miss Luton's legal and medical advisers break through their discreet reserve, and put the scandal-mongers to utter rout by the simple statement that the poor lady was deaf and dumb.

The third house, Wendholm Grange, was more modern than Oaklands, and more accessible, as it stood in the valley beneath it, and not far from the village and church. It belonged to an orphan heiress, who had left it at her parent's death and never

revisited it, having been ordered, it was said, to reside in Italy, on account of her delicate lungs. It was rumoured that she was engaged to be married to her cousin, Professor Farquhar, the distinguished traveller and naturalist ; and that on his return from his latest exploration of some remote island—which might have been in the moon for all that the Wendholmites knew of it—the marriage would take place, and the bridal pair settle down at the Grange.

The wedding, in due course, was announced in the fashionable London papers, and copied into the local ones ; but the Grange made no sign. A year later, the same papers proclaimed the death of the young bride in child-birth ; but it was four years before the widower brought his little daughter to the long-deserted home. In those three years the great wave of change, that is silently sweeping over the world,

broke with a tiny ripple into Wendholm's sheltered creek, and Wendholm turned on her pillows ; for to her

“ The river seemed the voice of dreams,
That murmured in her sleep.”

The old vicar was dead, and the curate, Charley Burnes, had been presented to the living, which had been previously offered to two other clergymen—not curates—who had successively declined it. Old Miss Luton was dead also, and had bequeathed all her “real estate” to her servants, and the Oaklands property to Mr. Burnes. She probably wished by this bequest to prove her attachment to the church, which she had never entered, and her respect for the church's representative, whom she had never seen. But the conditions of the legacy were such as to deprive it of its chief value. The game on the property was to be strictly preserved for a specified term of years, and

not a gun was to be fired in the woods during that period—a condition which gave great delight to the poachers, who did not at all consider the prohibition as binding upon them, and who contrived that when its term had expired, there should be nothing marketable left to fire a gun at! Then, not a tree was to be felled, nor a branch lopped in the woods; and the house was to be kept in as good order as when Miss Luton herself inhabited it. And this for a term of nine years! No wonder that poor Charley Burnes felt himself justified in declaring, with his habitual carelessness of diction, that his new heritage was “more bother than enough.” He could not live in it himself—it was too far from the church and the schools, too inaccessible to the parish generally; he could derive no profit from sale of the timber; and no country gentleman would care for a woodland

paradise where the pheasants and hares were sacred to the poachers, especially as, being forbidden to fire a gun in it, he could not even amuse himself by shooting *them*. However, the Vicar consoled himself with the reflection that when the nine years had expired (people at Wendholm did not think nine years a very long period to look forward to, as most of them reckoned on living to ninety-seven), that then Oaklands would be his own, to do what he liked with. The trees would be growing all the time ; the plantations and preserves would be re-stocked with game ; and he might let or sell the property at a price which would more than repay him for the long restriction.

So far these changes had produced no exterior effect on Wendholm. No one at Oaklands, no one yet at the Grange ; but there was one vast change at the Vicarage, for Mr. Burnes had married ! It will need

one more retrospective chapter to explain how this movement came about. But here Araminta interposes, throwing a dissatisfied glance at my still uncut pages.

“ You have said nothing yet of the ‘Upper Ten’ of your neighbourhood ? Were there no great landed proprietors there ? no local aristocracy ? no titled families ? What story can be worth telling which has not a lord in it ? ”

My Araminta, please remember that sixteen years ago the “new creations” of political exigency had not yet made titles as plenty as blackberries ; and—I blush to record it, but in the peerless rusticity of our parish there was not “A lord or a squire, or a knight of the shire,” or a lady in her own right or in anybody else’s !

At this humiliating statement Araminta lets fall my book, and glances yearningly at the novel in which she has lately been ab-

sorbed—a novel whose pages literally blaze with more dukes and duchesses than ever existed “simultaneous” in one country, but whose portraits are really remarkably life-like, considering that the gifted authoress never saw a duke; as life-like, almost, as Madame Tussaud’s wax effigies of the late Royal Family. Take up my poor volume again, dear Araminta; once more let me remind you that this chapter and the next are purely retrospective, beginning at sixteen years ago. Since then, Wendholm may have done better—just a little better—or how could I presume to speak of her people and their fortunes to one who, like “Jeames,” “can’t feel no hinterest in the lower horders”?

CHAPTER II.

THE BANKER'S DAUGHTERS.

MRS. BURNES was the daughter of a wealthy banker in Retford, who had been in the financial confidence of every family in the county, of income sufficient to warrant them in keeping a banking account at all. His wife was considered beneath him, having been distantly related to a tradesman in the town, and she was therefore persistently ignored by her husband's more aristocratic connections.

Charlotte was for twelve years their only child and presumptive heiress, when poor, weakly Mrs. Maitland astonished "society," her husband, and herself, by bringing into

the world a second daughter. Perhaps, being a shy, timid woman, she was unequal to the effort to face the ridicule, not to say censure, with which Retford “society” received such an act of domestic irrelevancy; for she faded away, suddenly, like a flower that has overbloomed, and the baby Juliet was left to the sole care of her sister, who, from her earliest girlhood, reigned supreme over Mr. Maitland’s old-fashioned, but comfortable establishment. Charlotte brought up her charge under the method of education that had been in vogue among a generation older than her own, a method which commended itself to her somewhat unbending temper and sense of right. So Juliet grew up, conscientious, pure-hearted, and docile, but not happy or strong. Her nature was as sensitive as Charlotte’s was robust (Mr. Burnes emphasized it as “robustious”), and, trained beneath a dis-

cipline of constant repression and reproof, she was painfully shy, and almost slavishly subservient to her sister, whom she looked upon as the express image and embodiment of all human wisdom and authority.

On Mr. Maitland's sudden death, it was found that his will had been executed before the death of his wife or the birth of his second child, and that, with the exception of a competent annuity for Mrs. Maitland, it left Charlotte his sole heiress. Probably he had intended at some future time to alter this arrangement ; or he might have believed that Juliet's interests were safer in her sister's hands than in her own. Anyhow, the effect was that, at five and thirty years of age, Miss Maitland found herself in possession of what was great wealth to one of her frugal habits and modest social position ; while her sister, in the bloom of youth—such bloom as had been granted to

such youth as hers—was dependent on her, as the homely phrase has it, “for the very clothes she stood up in” (a phrase, by the way, which had less significance then than now, when people find it easier to “stand up” in their clothes than to “sit down” in them !).

Miss Maitland showed no intention whatever to rectify what all Retford declared to be a blunder or an injustice on her father’s part. That, she said, might or might not be ; it was not for her to call her father’s conduct in question. It was her duty to carry out his wishes. He had left his whole fortune at her disposal, and at her disposal it should remain.

The Retford world, who hated Chatty Maitland, called her a stingy, selfish old cat—and their judgment was wrong, as the world’s superficial judgments often are. Miss Maitland loved power ; and the reins having

been placed in her hands, she was not the woman to relax her hold on them, or to dispute the wisdom that had committed them to her trust. But she never forgot that it was a trust; which, according to her lights, she fulfilled conscientiously.

For a few years the sisters lived quietly in a pretty villa close to Retford, to which they had removed on their father's death. They knew and were known by everybody in the county, but visited very rarely. Even the heiress's wealth brought no suitors to Simcliff Lodge. Few fortune-hunters would have braved Miss Chatty's cold scrutiny; and had any been attracted by the wan grace of the portionless Juliet, the dread of Charlotte as a sister-in-law would have acted as a countercharm.

So Miss Maitland had taken her place among the old maids of—Dorsetshire, and Juliet was meekly following, when, lo!

Charley Burnes came to the rescue of one, and indirectly, as it subsequently happened, of both.

Whether Mr. Burnes fell in love with the lady, or the lady with him, matters little, since the result was the same. Charlotte Maitland became Mrs. Burnes, having first taken care to have two-thirds of her fortune settled on herself, and upon her sister after her; and shortly afterwards the curate was presented to the living of Wendholm, where his active, energetic wife became the terror of the parishioners, and the object of special aversion to all the she-clergy of the diocese.

Naturally there was much adverse criticism of the new *ménage*. Said the public voice of Retford, "She is old enough to be his mother! He has married her for her money, and such worldliness (in a clergyman, too!) will be sure to meet its punishment. And so wilful as she is, he will never

be able to call his soul his own." (All the better for him, I suppose, if his punishment was to be a spiritual one.) "And that poor, weak Juliet to live always with them! It was well that she is not particularly attractive, for these old women are so jealous," etc., etc. Yet, in spite of these gloomy predictions, the marriage was a happy one. However cold and severe to others, Charlotte Burnes was loving and indulgent to her young husband; and he, indolent and easy tempered, flattered by her pride in him, and grateful for the help she gave him and the comforts which she lavished upon him, readily responded to her attachment, and repaid it by a sincere and loyal, if calm and unimpassioned affection. So the Retford prophets watched in vain for the thunderbolts of judgment that should have fallen on Charley Burnes for his mercenary marriage, and presently found that the gentle

Juliet was not destined to serve as a conductor for them.

Scarcely had the new Vicar settled himself comfortably in the home which had been so long familiar to him, but had now the charm of being really his own, with many other charms with which his wife's wealth adorned it, though more for his pleasure than for her own, when Dr. Farquhar returned to take up his abode at the Grange. This illustrious traveller was past early manhood, and was suffering from partial blindness, brought on by the fatigue and hardships he had undergone in foreign climates. He had been ordered by his doctors to retire for a time into the country for perfect rest and quiet. Rest he certainly could at Wendholm, but there was little hope of quiet for a man who, unaccustomed to household trials, with no relations and no companions, brought into his seclusion only three or four

servants, a middle-aged nurse, and a child of three years old. Thrown only on the Vicar's family for society, it was natural that he should appeal to Mrs. Burnes for such help in his domestic difficulties as only a lady can give. Chatty soon discovered that the blind master was robbed by his groom; that the nurse got drunk, and the child was neglected. She interposed, as was "her nature to;" but the servants rebelled against a delegated authority. Wars ensued, and the battle was fierce and furious, and drove Dr. Farquhar again and again to the quiet of the library at the Vicarage, where the pitying Juliet unweariedly read to him and wrote for him, or, while he conversed with Mr. Burnes, amused the little Genevra, who would cling to her and follow her everywhere, like a little dog. Of course the Retford folk sniffed at these proceedings, and declared that Chatty was a schemer.

They were wrong again. Mrs. Burnes was so entirely absorbed in her task of subduing the hostile forces at the Grange, that she took no heed of what might be going on in the Vicarage library, until one morning, on her return from a more than usually brisk engagement there, she was met by Juliet, all blushes and tears, with the intelligence that Dr. Farquhar had proposed to her, and she had accepted him.

Poor Juliet's blushes and tears were alike thrown away. Dr. Farquhar's views on marriage were strictly utilitarian and sentiment or passion held no place in them. He wanted a secretary for himself, a mistress for the Grange, and a mother for his little daughter, and neither felt nor pretended to feel any warmth of attachment for the lady who perfectly and lovingly fulfilled these requirements. If Juliet was disappointed she expressed no disappointment, nor had

she much time to indulge it. Dr. Farquhar recovered his eyesight a few months after his marriage, and the traveller's instinct awoke again in him. He made a will, bequeathing all his property to Mrs. Farquhar during her life, except in the event of her remarriage, when it reverted to his child, on whom her mother's fortune was settled ; and then he took himself off to the wilds of Thibet in search of some new plant or rare insect that he expected to find there. She received one or two letters from him after his departure, strictly enjoining her, should he never return, to make the Grange her home as long as she lived ; to divide her authority over Genevra with no one, but to bring her up in the country, among all the rural scenes and tastes that had been so dear to himself, and never to thwart her in a single thing ! And very soon afterwards came the news of his death.

From that time forth Mrs. Burnes resumed her sway over her sister in everything but what related to the little girl. Timid as Mrs. Farquhar was, her conscientiousness and loyalty gave her courage to defend the trust committed to her, even as against the revered Chatty, who gave way with dignity, but with something of the mild surprise that a cat might be supposed to feel if a mouse turned round and spit at her. But she, too, was strictly conscientious. When Juliet urged, "It must be so, sister Chatty. Genevra has been entrusted to me by her father on these conditions, and I dare not disobey his dying wishes," she would reply—

"Well, since it seems to have been his wish that the child should grow up an undisciplined savage, I suppose you cannot help it. Not for all the wealth in the world would I have accepted such a frightful responsibility; and I am not sorry, Juliet,

that you refuse to admit me to any share in it."

But, after all, Genevra did not grow up a savage, though in the way of discipline there might have been something to be desired. The child's nature was one that rebelled against coercion, that was not easily amenable to mere authority of any kind, but which was yielding and docile to all appeals to the affections. Mrs. Farquhar's heart had been chilled by restraint in her early youth, and disappointed in her uncongenial marriage, but it went forth with all the more ardour of passionate love to the orphan child, who from the first had called her mother; and by her gentle influence she had trained her to something like sympathy with her own essential womanliness, so that her unconventionally fearless and impulsive temperament had never betrayed a trace of unmaidenly coarseness in word or

act. She worshipped her stepmother; she dearly loved the kind Vicar; and if she declined to reckon “Sister Chatty” among her titular kindred—for she always called Mr. Burnes “Uncle Charley”—there was no malice in the playful girlish insolence with which alone she ever replied to the cold sarcasms by which Mrs. Burnes expressed her disapproval of what she called “tomboy manners.”

She had no associates of her own age, as Mrs. Farquhar shrank from even such limited social intercourse as she might have found around Wendholm, and Mrs. Burnes was unpopular in the neighbourhood, and had no intimacies. Genevra’s childhood was spent in the summers in the fields and woods, among the happy woodland creatures, in Nature’s music and sunshine; by the fireside in the winter, at her mother’s knee, poring over fairy tales and ballads, which

she had fished up out of some old nursery stores that had amused the first Mrs. Farquhar when a child. Her stepmother had herself undertaken the task of her education, moved thereto partly by an instinctive jealousy of any stranger's influence over her darling, partly from the certainty of "Sister Chatty's" unexpressed but very active hostility against any unfortunate governess whose ideas of scholastic discipline should be formed on a method some fifty years more modern than her own.

And so Genevra grew up in the wilds of Wendholm,

"A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love."

No savage, assuredly; but fresh and sweet as a hedge-rose, and with some of its thorns about her too. Healthy, happy, pure, though knowing but little of the "culture" of the day, and less of its fashionable conventions,

there was much for Genevra to learn yet, even when she had attained the mature age of sixteen, when this sketch of her simple fortunes commences.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE VICARAGE.

THE Vicar of Wendholm laid down his newspaper with a yawn (it was two days old), and walked to the window—an old-fashioned window, with a window seat, in which Mrs. Burnes sat, mending a glove with the careful accuracy she always bestowed on the smallest employment. The Vicar looked on for a moment silently; there is no possible opening for comment on the mending of a glove, so he yawned again, and Mrs. Burnes glanced up from her work with a mild remonstrance.

“It is early to yawn so, Charles. You can’t be so sleepy at ten o’clock in the morn-

ing ; and you made a good breakfast too. People yawn for hunger sometimes."

"They gape, you mean," corrected Charley. "Callow birds do ; but I *am* hungry, Chatty."

Again Mrs. Burnes glanced up, and this time with a faint surprise ; for scarcely had the breakfast-table been cleared of an empty coffee-pot and the ruins of a veal pie and half a small ham, for all of which ruins Mr. Burnes was to be held responsible. But she waited to finish her glove before speaking again, and the Vicar resumed.

"I am hungry for news, Chatty. That postman is later every day. He must walk from Retford on all fours. Oh, I know what you are going to say—that if I had exerted myself as you wished, we should have had a post-office of our own at Wendum before now ; though we should have been no better off—the same 'walking

gentleman' would have brought the bags. I could not have affirmed that our Wendholm correspondence would have been sufficient to load a mail-cart or even a hand-barrow."

"I was not going to say anything of the kind, Charles; I was going to say that the postman was earlier than usual this morning, for he passed the garden gate, on his way back, while you were finishing your last cup of coffee."

"And no newspaper for me?" cried Charley, an expression of blank despair overshadowing his naturally serene and jovial countenance—an expression which might have softened a heart of stone; and Mrs. Burnes' heart was not of stone, or it was stone of a very porous nature, as regarded her husband, and she hesitated—she, who prided herself on never hesitating—to suggest consolation.

“ I dare say he had letters for Juliet, and your paper may have been put into her bag. They have done that before now, though they have no right to do it, and if they do it again I must insist on your complaining.”

But Mr. Burnes only listened to the first part of his wife’s speech.

“ Of course,” he cried eagerly ; “ that’s what it is, no doubt ! I’ll run over to the Grange directly, and ask——”

But Mrs. Burnes checked him. “ My dear Charles, there is no time for you to go to the Grange and back before ten ; it is a quarter to ten now, and Collis is to meet you at the school at ten o’clock about repairing the wainscoting in Miss White’s parlour. Can’t you wait a few hours for the paper ? ”

“ Oh, bother ! I suppose I must. You are so insistent on the point of punctuality, Chatty.”

Mrs. Burnes smiled. People used to say that her smile was cold and wooden, and never brightened her face; but there was always a ray of wintry sunshine in it when it shone upon her husband.

“It is worth some insistance, Charles, to gain for you the character you have of being the most punctual man in Wendholm.” Then, rising from her seat, she added, “I will walk with you as far as the school, and go on to the Grange for your paper. I shall be back with it before you have finished your business with Collis.”

“All right,” assented Charley joyfully. “Be quick with your toilette—but that you always are. ‘A bonnie bride is soon dressed.’”

The implied compliment may have quickened Mrs. Burnes’s movements, for she very soon reappeared in her walking dress, and the pair set off on their walk.

They were not such an ill-matched pair after all, notwithstanding the disparity of their ages. True, the wife was on the shady side of fifty ; but she was one of those women who have never looked very young, and never look much older after the first bloom, the brief bloom of youth, has passed. Her step was firm and light, her figure trim, and always arrayed in simple but very neatly fitting dresses ; her hair showed no thread of silver, and her features only failed of beauty from the immobility and want of expression, which at least preserved them from the lines and wrinkles which tell the march of time and sensibility in a more animated face. And even yet, as in earlier days, Mrs. Burnes had narrowly escaped being handsome. Nature, in a capricious mood, had neutralized every personal advantage she had bestowed on her, by adding a corresponding defect. Her

forehead was too narrow for its height (it had been made high before low ones had come into fashion, which had not yet reverted to the type of the baboon or marmoset). Her large grey eyes were placed so near together that they might have formed one, like a Cyclops, had they not been separated by the high bridge of an aquiline nose, which, like the wall of Pyramus and Thisbe, seemed to part a pair that yearned for union. That nose, too!—faultless in shape, but with a flush on its extreme tip quite out of keeping with the otherwise colourless complexion, and which originated Charley's pet name for his wife—of his “Rose-bud.” There could be no greater proof of Mrs. Burnes' devotion to her lord, than that she not only permitted this not very delicate pleasantry, but even received it with complacency. Few people tolerate such allusions to little personal blemishes, and all are

sensitive on the subject (I had almost said the point) of their noses. Then, Chatty's upper lip was so inordinately long, that her mouth appeared at first sight to have disappeared altogether, consumed, it might be, by the fiery nose. But, when discovered, it was by no means ill-formed ; and even at her present age her teeth were white and even, although her rare smile hardly disclosed them, by reason of that straight and resolute upper lip. These defects negatived any claims to beauty Mrs. Burnes's friends would have ever advanced for her, and certainly she would never have cared to advance any for herself. Charley Burnes looked older than his age. Good-tempered, easy-going Charley, with his ill-knit figure, much inclining to obesity, his slouching, shuffling gait, his thin, grizzled hair, and unduly developed chin—Charley might have been forty-seven, instead of thirty-nine ; and

there appeared no reason, in the outward presentation of things, why Mrs. Burnes should always treat him with the calm indulgence rather befitting a mother than a wife, in spite of his attempt to repel it by a kind of innocent conjugal gallantry, by which he tried to assert their real relation ; for it is an observable fact that when a man marries a woman older than himself, it is always the husband who is most sensitive to the ridicule of the world, while the wife disregards the fact, except as it may possibly annoy him.

The pair walked on through the Vicarage shrubbery in silence, which Mr. Burnes suddenly broke by exclaiming—

“ Whom can they be from ? ”

“ Whom can what be from, dear ? ”

“ Why, Juliet’s letters. She must have had a lot this morning for the postman to have been in such a hurry to get rid of

them that he could not stop to leave my paper. Poor old fellow ! he is so unused to heavy loads that a letter more than usual tries him cruelly."

"How absurd you are, Charles ! You know Juliet has no correspondence beyond a few trade circulars or such things. The postman has seldom any letters to deliver at the Grange, except for the servants."

"Chatty," persisted the Vicar solemnly, "she must have had as many letters this morning as would outweigh my *Times*, supplement and all ; for certainly that postman would have rid himself of the heaviest burden first."

Mrs. Burnes did not consider this remark as worthy of a reply. Presently Charley broke out again—

"Valentines ! late valentines ! Valentines for the servants ! Valentines for Jenny ! "

"Really, Charles," remonstrated his com-

panion, "such a suggestion from any one but you would be vulgar! Servants' valentines are quite beneath your attention; and Jenny's! A child of her age! Who is there, besides, to send valentines to *her*?"

"A child? Why, she is sixteen. I dare say you thought yourself a woman at her age, Chatty?"

"Possibly. But then I had a woman's duties, a woman's sense of responsibility; Genevra has only her amusements."

"As for who is to send her valentines," continued the irrepressible Charley, disregarding his wife's grave tone; "well, unless one of the ushers in Dr. Bartlett's school, or the butcher's boy, who belongs, I suppose, to the kitchen-maid—— Well, I am afraid I must discard the valentine theory. Hullo! Chatty, you have passed the turning to the Grange. Hurry back, there's a love, and get the paper as quick as you can, or

old Collis will bore me to death with his long-winded suggestions about those repairs."

And, kissing his hand to his spouse as she turned away, the Vicar went on to keep his appointment at the school, and justify the opinion won for him by Mrs. Burnes, of being "the most punctual man in Wendholm"—a character which he entirely owed to her untiring exertions to keep him in the path of duty.

CHAPTER IV.

CATERPILLARS.

WENDHOLM GRANGE was a pretty country house, of no great pretension, situated about half a mile from the church and village, and at the opposite end from the Vicarage. The woods of Oakland Heights clothed all the slopes that intervened, and the woodland paths that ascended to it could be reached as soon from the Grange as from the Vicarage, by striking into them from the high-road.

The Grange was surrounded by well-planted and well-kept lawns and shrubberies; but, beyond a few acres of meadow, there was nothing to entitle the proprietors to be

called "landed gentry," any more than the united fortunes of Dr. Farquhar and his first bride could have conferred upon their daughter the distinction of being a great heiress. The wealth of the first Mrs. Farquhar had, with the exception of this house, been settled upon herself and her child, and did not exceed six or seven hundred a year. Dr. Farquhar's income had been considerably less, as his expenditure had been lavish ; and he had left all to his second wife while she remained unmarried. But Mrs. Burnes had considered that her trusteeship of her sister's right to their father's wealth might with propriety be transferred to her sister's husband, and had made a liberal settlement upon Juliet ; so that the pleasant home was kept in perfect order, and every domestic detail was arranged without extravagance or display, but with comfort, and even a certain elegance.

Mrs. Burnes, on arriving at the Grange, took the privilege of a near relative of entering the house without ringing the bell. She entered through a verandah that ran along two sides of the garden and drive, into a large, low vestibule filled, from ceiling to floor, with the multifarious spoils of Dr. Farquhar's scientific and zoological researches all over the world, which made it look more like a museum than a hall. "Sister Chatty" always said that, to keep it in proper order, a curator was needed, in addition to the housemaid who was "told off" for that special business; and she glanced with some contempt on the wild beasts' skins that lay about in all directions, the cases of stuffed birds and animals piled up to the ceiling, and all the "lumber," as she called it, of geological specimens and fossils in one corner, and savage weapons, household utensils, and all sorts of anti-

quities, civilized and barbarous, in another—all which had been a fairy-land of delight to Genevra in her childhood, and a wide field of suggestive dreaming still.

Something of the air of the naturalist's haunt pervaded even Mrs. Farquhar's drawing-room—a room with large windows opening on the lawn in front, and another at the side, into a conservatory filled with azaleas and heaths, and bright with flowers on every available stand or bracket. No one with a soul above cabinet-making would have noticed that the furniture, although once fashionable, and still comfortable, was of twenty years' date, and so not even fashionable now, far less æsthetic ; and that all the paintings on the walls were merely copies from the old masters, executed by the first Mrs. Farquhar in water colours during her long residence in Italy, and therefore valueless from a marketable point

of view. But the tastes of the late master of the Grange were still traceable in the furs and rugs and strange foreign ornaments, much rarer a few years ago in drawing-rooms than they are now ; and the inherited proclivities of his youthful heiress could be guessed by the birds that fluttered gaily within their quaint Indian cages, and a cat which took no notice of them, being too deeply engrossed by the cares of a family of small kittens, which had evidently never yet known anything of the world, beyond the sofa in a corner whereon they lay.

Mrs. Farquhar, a pale, fragile-looking woman, with straw-coloured hair, streaked with the silver of which her elder sister's showed not a thread, with a low voice and kind grey eyes—who bore not the most distant family likeness to Mrs. Burnes—was leaning back in an easy-chair, with her hands lying idly in her lap ; but on her

sister's entrance she (as the French say) "redressed" herself, and tried to seem, and to feel, interested in the crochet-work which was on the table at her side. Miss Farquhar, on the other hand, was too profoundly interested in her occupation even to look round as the door opened —that occupation being the rather difficult one of keeping within the limits of a shallow sandal-wood tray a number of the black, long-haired caterpillars of the tiger-moth that the country people call "woolly bears;" and as they are gifted with a great rapidity of motion, it required skill to keep them from escaping on the one side of the tray as fast as they were pushed back on the other. But at Mrs. Farquhar's greeting to her sister, Genevra did look up, and even rose and went forward to touch Mrs. Burnes's cheek with her lips, and then rushed back to arrest the progress of her "woolly bears,"

that were rapidly scattering over the room and the window-panes ; unconsciously displaying, as she did so, a simple grace of gesture and motion that is rarely met with except in children. At the first glance, indeed, Genevra might have been mistaken for a child—her figure was so *mignon*, and the careless simplicity of her manner so devoid of self-consciousness or conventional reserve. But the second glance would have showed her for what she was—a girl of sixteen, whose slight form the rounded curves of early womanhood were softening into the promise of richer beauty, with the tiniest hands and feet, and a well-poised head with a wealth of nut-brown hair ; for as yet the hair-dressers had not taken their fashions from the convict prison or the orphan homes.

But Genevra's face, at that time, was still younger than her figure, and no one would

have called it beautiful, although most people who glanced at her once would have let their gaze dwell longer on her a second time. Her complexion was not dazzling in rose and snow, but it had the clear bloom of perfect health, with the delicacy that easily reflects every fleeting shade of emotion. Her nose was not Grecian, but neither was it snub. The red lips had a way of setting themselves a little too firmly, which, with the rather heavy eyebrows and deeply fringed lashes, both much darker than her hair, gave to the whole face the expression, half musing, half resolute, of a mutinous child; and only when the deep blue eyes sparkled with merriment, which showed the small white teeth and awoke a lovely dimple in the cheek, to match the one that always nestled in the chin,—only at such moments—and they were rare—would a casual observer have dreamed of calling Jenny Farquhar even pretty.

“ You will excuse me for remarking on your household arrangements, Juliet,” said Mrs. Burnes, in the tone of ceremonious formality with which she usually attempted remonstrance, “ but is a lady’s drawing-room a proper place to study grubs in ?”

“ They are not grubs, sister Chatty, ” corrected the young entomologist; “ they are caterpillars, and very scarce at this early season, and they have changed their second skins too !”

“ But can you not keep them in, say, the breakfast-room ?”

“ No, I can’t, because mamma does not care to sit anywhere but in this room, and she likes to have me with her, caterpillars and all.”

“ I very much prefer their being here, ” said Mrs. Farquhar, “ for at first Jenny did bring them into the breakfast-room, and I found one in the cream-jug. Good

heavens ! Chatty, what is the matter ? Are you ill ? ”

For a sudden spasm contracted Mrs. Burnes’s not very mobile features, and she sat stiff and rigid, looking straight before her, as at Medusa’s head.

“ Genevra,” she said, in a firm but rather hollow voice, “ one of those reptiles is racing up my boot ! ”

“ Shake him off,” answered Jenny, carelessly.

A strong shudder passed over Mrs. Burnes’s frame, and she jerked her foot out straight before her, and sat fixed in an attitude which was the last she would have chosen as graceful or decorous, as she murmured in hollow tones—

“ I cannot touch it ; it makes my blood run cold ! ”

Jenny ran to her relief, and captured the “reptile.”

“Why, Mrs. Burnes,” she cried, “I never knew you were so timid! A ‘woolly bear’ does not hurt any one.”

“I have heard, Genevra,” answered Chatty, “that they curl round on people—that beast is doing so now!—and that their hairs have a stinging property, like nettles, whence they are sometimes called ‘devil’s rings.’” Then, too conscientiously truthful to plead this doubtful fact as her excuse, she added, “But whether that is so or not, I have an unreasoning horror of caterpillars, or maggots, or whatever you call them.”

“Well, then,” said Jenny, saucily, “you can never more scold Martha, as you did the other day, for screaming so at a spider.”

“Perhaps not,” replied sister Chatty, reflectively; then she suddenly added, “unless I can convince myself that such repulsions can be mastered. Give me that creature, Genevra.”

Jenny disengaged the insect from her finger, round which it had formed a "hair ring," and watched Mrs. Burnes with some curiosity, as she took it from her into her own hands, and gazed steadily upon it as it curled itself up again in her hold—gazed on it without shrinking, but with a sternness that might have been copied from a St. George fighting the Dragon. Sympathizing with her heroism, the girl relieved her of it, and put it back on the tray, saying—

"Henceforth, Mrs. Burnes, you will be more indulgent to Martha's weakness?"

"On the contrary," answered Mrs Burnes, "I shall insist on her overcoming it, since I find that it can be done."

"Poor Martha!" laughed Miss Farquhar, as she quitted the room with her unappreciated treasures.

"How like her dear father!" sighed Mrs. Farquhar, as her step-daughter disappeared.

“ Do you not think, sister, that she is growing very lovely ? ”

“ No, I do not,” replied Chatty, briefly ; and, rising, she brushed off some hairs the caterpillar had left on her dress, with an air of supreme disgust ; which, however, was meant for the “ woolly bear,” not for Genevra. “ I am forgetting Charley’s errand,” she said. “ I was to ask you, did the postman leave his paper here this morning ? ”

“ Yes, with some stupid circulars for me from some of the Retford tradesmen. It is on the table in the corner. I should have sent it on to you before lunch if you had not called.”

Mrs. Burnes went to the table and took her paper, uttering an exclamation as she did so.

“ Here is a letter that has slipped under the wrapper,” she cried—“ a private letter, black bordered. Who is your correspondent, Juliet ? ”

“Who *can* it be from?” said Juliet, turning the letter round and closely examining it on all sides. “I receive so few letters, I do not know the handwriting; and a monogram! I can never make out those twirly monograms. Whose *can* it be?”

“Possibly the signature may tell you,” answered Charlotte. “If you would but open it, Juliet, you will ascertain who wrote it.”

Mrs. Farquhar acted upon this obvious suggestion; then she uttered a faint exclamation of surprise, of which Mrs. Burnes took no notice, her attention being fixed upon one of Genevra’s “woolly bears,” which had fallen unobserved upon the carpet, and was making rapidly for Mrs. Burnes’s legs.

“Juliet, *do* take up this beast! I have suffered enough from them for one day. It is quite ridiculous of Martha to make the fuss she does about spiders; they are not half so unpleasant as these things. It is the

hairiness of them that makes them so repulsive."

But Juliet, absorbed in her letter, made no reply. So Mrs. Burnes "took her courage in both hands" and Juliet's large scissors in one, and, using the scissors as tongs, took up the caterpillar, which giving a remonstrative twirl as she lifted it, poor Mrs. Burnes's fingers contracted spasmically, with the disastrous result to the creature that it fell in two halves on the floor; and she dropped the scissors with a shudder just as Genevra came into the room.

"Have you seen ——"she began; then, following the direction of Mrs. Burnes's eyes, "Oh, sister Chatty, you have found it and killed it! How cruel of you!"

"I did not do it on purpose, Genevra. I was taking it up, and it came to pieces in that unpleasant way. You know I never wantonly destroy any creature life that may

have its uses, though what can have been the use of *that* animal?"

"The world will be the less beautiful for its loss—this summer at least," replied Jenny, regretfully gathering up the fragments of her pet, to throw them out of the window.

"I dispute that, Jenny," said Mrs. Burnes. "The world is not enriched by the beauty of a black caterpillar."

"But by the beauty of an exquisite tiger-moth, sister Chatty. The world will be the poorer for losing *that*."

Mrs. Farquhar, placidly unmoved by a catastrophe to which people addicted to pets soon grow inured, now handed her letter to her sister; while Genevra, who seldom cared to share in the councils of the elder ladies, once more quitted the room, just as Mr. Burnes entered it. Mrs. Burnes, in her turn, glanced at the signature.

"From Millicent Carruthers?" she said.

“ Was not she Dr. Farquhar’s young sister, who threw over the man she was engaged to, to marry his rich uncle for his title ? I remember he told us of it once, and that he and his brother-in-law had quarrelled about settlements and become permanently estranged. Why does she write to you, Juliet ? ”

“ She is a widow now, poor thing ! ” said Juliet. “ You told me some months ago that you saw the advertisement of a Sir William Carruthers’ death in the *Times*, but we took no notice. We did not know him, and we had received no cards.”

“ What does she write to you about ? ” repeated Mrs. Burnes.

“ Oh, I can’t half make out her scrawl. Read it aloud to me, Chatty.”

Mrs. Burnes took the letter, searched in her pocket for her glasses, adjusted them leisurely, and read slowly as follows, with occasional interruptions of her own :—

“‘MY DEAR MRS. FARQUHAR’ (she does not call you sister, you see)—

“‘I do not doubt that you have felt for me in my great trial, under such peculiar circumstances too, which you may have learnt from the newspapers.’ (She does not apologize for not having sent you a proper notification of it, although I remember that Charles sent a courteous letter to Sir William when Dr. Farquhar died, which was taken no notice of.) ‘My husband’s only son and heir—he was a year or two older than myself—was killed by a fall from his horse in the Bois de Boulogne, and the shock proved fatal to Sir William a week later. So long as he lived I was forbidden to hold any intercourse with my brother’s family; but I think such resentments ought not to be handed down to younger generations, and my dear girls and my brother’s child are without any

nearer relatives on either side, and should be *almost* sisters.' (There is something in that.) ' Will you accept my olive branch, dear Mrs. Farquhar ? My eldest daughter, Anne, is to be married in a fortnight to a young clergyman she has been engaged to for some years. Will you allow my niece to be one of her bridesmaids ? The wedding will, of course, be strictly private, and a fortnight later my daughter Georgina and myself are going on a visit to a friend who is staying in Paris, and your dear little girl will have only a month in which to make the acquaintance of her cousins, which will, I hope, be the commencement of a life-long friendship. So pray send her to us as soon as you possibly can.

“ ‘ We are all grieved that we cannot welcome her to our home—no longer ours—in Cumberland. Only a few months before he died, Sir William let his beautiful place,

“Brackensfell,” and took this hideous old house, in a dull, old-fashioned quarter, in order to be near his favourite doctor (he was a great invalid latterly), and, as he said, that we ladies might be near the shops. As if we wanted to be near shops! However, I dare say they will amuse my niece; and, under present circumstances, I have little else in the way of amusement to offer her. But I trust that brighter times are at hand for my dear girls, though not for me, and that my niece may share them. With kindest love,’ etc., etc.”

Mrs. Burnes laid down the letter, took off her glasses, and looked at her sister. After a brief pause: “Well, Juliet? Will you let Genevra go?”

“Ought I?” answered Mrs. Farquhar. “She is such a home bird, my Jenny, and so young to be trusted among strangers.”

“They ought not to be strangers; they

are her only relatives, and this may be the last, as well as the first, advance they will ever make. I do not think you should reject it, Juliet."

"I fear——" began Mrs. Farquhar.

But here a new member was added to the family council in the person of Mr. Burnes, who, having finished his conference in the village sooner than he had expected, had come in search of his wife and his paper, and was speedily put in possession of the astounding fact that Genevra's relations had "come to the fore," and had invited her to visit them in town.

"Now, I wonder," queried the Vicar, laying down Lady Carruthers' letter, after a careful perusal of it—"I wonder what put it into her head to notice Jenny at all?"

"Family affection, I should hope, Charles," said his spouse.

"Family fudge!" was Charles's irreverent

reply. “Dr. Farquhar had seen very little of his sister, who was much younger than he, and had been brought up by some old lady whom he never visited. Not much affection there, I fancy. Then he quarrelled with her husband, and there was no communication between them till his death. Sir William never took the least notice of his widow and daughter, and Lady Carruthers has herself waited to apprise them of her own widowhood till it is eight months old. Even this invitation is cautiously limited to a month, at longest. The whole thing is an afterthought. I should like to know what put it into her head !”

“But, my dear Charles,” observed Mrs. Burnes, “that is not the question of immediate interest to Juliet. She wishes for advice as to whether she ought to accept the invitation for her daughter.”

“Of course she ought,” was the Vicar’s unhesitating reply. “It is high time that Jenny should know something of what is going on in the world beyond this nook of ours, and have some associates nearer her own age than we three old folks. Her only relations too!”

“That was my view,” said Mrs. Burnes. “We should be blamed, and justly so, if we isolated her from her own kindred.”

“My Rosebud,” rejoined the Vicar (using this term of the greatest endearment to his Chatty), “she has been isolated long enough. You are always complaining that Juliet lets her run wild. I do not myself see anything amiss with the child, but if she wants any training, she will get it best by observation of other girls, and get a taste, perhaps, for more civilized amusement than running about the woods after black beetles.”

“Very well,” said Mrs. Farquhar, resignedly. “Then it is settled that she shall go; but she cannot go alone?”

“If that is all, I will take her up to town myself,” answered good-natured Charley, “when you have settled with her ladyship when she is to start. By the way, Sir William’s son having died unmarried, who is the heir to that title and estate? Is it the nephew, I wonder, whom Lady Carruthers jilted to marry the baronet? Rather awkward for her now if it is.”

“Such a long time ago,” said sister Chatty; “that must be forgotten. Why, it was before we knew Dr. Farquhar, and years before Jenny was born. Her cousins must be older than she is. Besides, there may be other nephews. It would be as well not to allude to that transgression of Lady Carruthers’ in Genevra’s presence, Charles.”

“But,” suggested Mrs. Farquhar, “if

Jenny does not care to make her aunt's acquaintance, I cannot force her to go, sister Chatty."

"So likely!" rejoined Mr. Burnes, laughing. "What young girl would not care for change—for making friends with other young people, for seeing town and shops, and, above all things, for being bridesmaid at a wedding? Jenny will dance for joy!"

And Uncle Charley was right.

CHAPTER V.

SIR WILLIAM CARRUTHERS, BART.

A QUARTER of a century is an appreciable portion of a life, and it was five and twenty years, and a little over, since Brian Carruthers was Milly Farquhar's lover.

The nephew of Sir William Carruthers, and wholly dependent upon his uncle, who had reared him from a boy, fed, clothed, and educated him—grudgingly, it is true, but still in accordance with the social traditions of his class—he had no prospect of inheriting title or fortune, as Sir William's only son was but a year or two older than himself, strong and healthy, and with every likelihood of inheriting the longevity

of his race, almost every member of which had kept his heir waiting for his lawful succession until but a comparatively short time remained for him to enjoy it in. And the heir had never, from any unreasonable impatience, been missing when the roll-call summoned him.

Having, therefore, no fortune of his own, and, as clerk in the Foreign Office, no prospect of advancement beyond the faint chances of family interest—very faint in his case, as Sir William was a languid politician and lived far remote from political circles—it was quite in the natural order of events, first, that the young man should incur debts ; and, secondly, that he should engage himself to a girl without a penny. In this double difficulty he had recourse to his cousin, Bertram Carruthers, for advice and assistance. But Bertram had difficulties of his own to contend with in the money line,

and was not at all accustomed to trouble himself with the difficulties of other people ; so he coolly handed him over to the secular arm, by enclosing his artless confession in his next letter to Sir William, who calmly, without apparent anger or malice, wrote to his nephew, demanding “full particulars ;” and on receiving them proceeded to devise such remedial measures as seemed to him to suit the case. The debts were not appalling. Brian was careless rather than extravagant, and the whole amount of his liabilities for three years did not equal one column of the schedule which was annually handed to Bertram’s father by Bertram’s creditors, and paid without a murmur. But that was no precedent ; rather, the more frequently the baronet was asked to pay his son’s debts, the more unpalatable was the request to pay his nephew’s also. And he could foresee no end to such appeals.

If Brian's services to an ungrateful Government were so inadequately rewarded that his income could not suffice for his personal expenses, how would it meet the added burthen of a household? *Noblesse oblige.* Sir William had few relations, and had but little affection for any of them, except his son, whom he idolized ; but he had family pride, and, believing in the "solidarity of race," would have done his utmost to maintain any relative of his name on what he considered the normal level. "A link which cannot be broken," he used to say, "should be kept from soilure or defacement, which is a blemish to the chain." And hence his nephew's impecunious marriage would involve not only a probable claim upon him for the butcher's and baker's bills incurred for a thriving nursery, but the further and graver necessity of providing "careers" for the inmates of that nursery

when they should sally forth into the world.

Sir William Carruthers, unlike his nephew and son, was a man of iron resolution and tenacity of purpose ; but it was a silent, bull-dog tenacity, that never “gave tongue.” He mused for some hours on his nephew’s letter, and then, without replying to it, started off to London, and called upon a former friend of his, who possessed some influence in the Foreign Office, and, after a short conference with him, obtained for his nephew the appointment of British Consul at Rio Vedas, a small seaport on the South American coast—an insignificant place, rarely visited by merchant vessels on their way to ship guano from a neighbouring island. A few Bristol and Liverpool firms had representatives in the town, and had recently begged for a consul to protect their trading interests. And Sir William

returned to his hotel, smiling vengefully, as he thought of his refined, fastidious nephew expiating his financial and amatory transgressions among merchants' clerks, and supercargoes, and the "spicy breezes" of the guano isles !

A few days sufficed for his further arrangements, and then the blow was dealt. Brian was summoned from a regatta in the Isle of Wight to meet his autocratic relative in town, and ordered to start for Rio Vedas in ten days, in a ship bound for a Brazilian port, in which his passage had been secured. Resistance would have been vain ; but Sir William knew his man, and feared no resistance. Brian, like the rest of his family, had sufficient tenacity of purpose when once his purpose was clear to himself ; but he was dreamy and indolent, and readier to accept the suggestion of another than to originate one of his own. He was like a shell-snail,

which can be taken up and set down where you will, and, after a period of reflection, it will take steadily, though leisurely, the path before it, never turning aside, or seeming to object that it was not the course it had chosen for itself. Its motto may be "*J'arrive*," but it evidently dislikes being hurried, and in that point also young Carruthers resembled it. Or, he was like a ruminating animal receiving the food offered by any familiar hand, but requiring a long time to chew the cud of meditation upon it, before it could become nutritive to the organs of impulse and activity.

And Sir William took care to give him no time for remonstrance, nor even for a last adieu to his beloved ; only so far condescending as to remind him that his exile was merely temporary, and would be exchanged for a better office, when something better fell in the way ; and as for the

marriage question, that must be postponed at least until his debts were paid—which payment was made conditional on his unhesitating obedience.

But the attitude of Brian's mind was not hesitation, but a brooding pensiveness. So his uncle saw all necessary arrangements completed ; put him on board the *Anna Moore* an hour before she sailed, waved a farewell to him from the shore as she moved away, and left him to brood at his leisure during a three months' voyage.

That was Sir William's first move. His second was to seek out the friends of the young lady to whom Brian had engaged himself, and obtain their co-operation in cancelling such an imprudent agreement.

Millicent Farquhar had few friends. An orphan, whose only brother was very seldom in England, she lived in a dull cathedral city in the North, with an old

lady, her great-aunt, the widow of a Church dignitary, on whom she was wholly dependent, and with whom she led a dull life. She had met Brian at a ball during a visit to London with Mrs. Elwes in the spring ; and, as Sir William found to his great satisfaction, the engagement to a “detrimental” had received a very reluctant sanction from the old lady, which she was most eager to withdraw, on learning that the youth’s uncle disapproved of his marrying at present. But the girl herself ? Sir William looked at her and considered. She was very young and very pretty : the beauty of a Hebe, plump, fair, fresh, and rosy—the charms which are often so attractive to elderly bachelors or widowers. She was a lady in every sense of the word, and with a character which her aunt called “quite unformed”—she might have said it was non-existent ; and Sir William further considered. It

was his duty to break off an engagement which could only bring her unhappiness ; it was his duty to soften the pain of the blow, and, if possible, console her. A few tears, easily dried, were followed by smiles, which showed that he had “done his spirit-ing gently,” and the duty of consolation he fulfilled by marrying her himself !

But, alas ! the honey of poor Millicent Carruthers’ honeymoon was spread very thinly indeed on her bridal cakes. Sir William, in marrying a portionless girl, had not an idea of spending any more money on her than on her food, drink, and clothing. He had made her “my lady,” and it behoved her to rest content with that distinction, which her young lover could *not* have given her, and demand no more in the way of fashionable amusements, dresses, and visiting, than he *could* have given her ; and that would have been very little indeed.

Sir William's resources were heavily taxed to support the extravagance of his son, while his dearest wish was to hand down his estate of Brackensfell to his heir, unburthened by charge or liability of any kind, and to do this a rigid economy was necessary. So he pinched and saved, with scarce a murmur, to provide Bertram with money to be squandered on the racecourse and the gaming-tables. It was not altogether Millicent Farquhar's pretty face which had led Sir William to think of marrying her. No, it was economy! If she married Brian he would have to bear all the expenses of the young *ménage*. If the *ménage* were his own, he would be better able to regulate those expenses, and have what enjoyment it could afford as well. The friends of this girl were not in a position to insist on settlements which would encumber the estate, so he offered none.

Brackensfell was lonely, and a fair face at his table would be pleasant to see, and would not need expensive gewgaws to make it fairer—quite the reverse if he were called on to pay for them; and she had another advantage—she had no relatives except a brother, much older than she was, the distinguished traveller and naturalist, Dr. Farquhar, who, being far from Europe at the time of her hasty marriage, could not be consulted about it. He heard of it, however, in time to write a letter of angry remonstrance to Mrs. Elwes, that reached her a few days before the wedding, in which he reproached her for consenting to the sacrifice of his young sister, a girl of eighteen, to a man old enough to be her father, who was selfish enough to propose leaving her at his death dependent on the bounty of his heir, a *roué* and a spend-thrift. Mrs. Elwes showed this letter to

Sir William, who took no further notice of it than to inform his wife that from thenceforth Dr. Farquhar's name was blotted out from the list of his family connections ; and, as the brother and sister had never shared the same home, and had but rarely met, Lady Carruthers yielded without a sigh. Indeed, she soon found she wanted all the sighs of which her lungs were capable for herself.

Brackensfell was a dreary mansion on a wild moorland in the North. Such capabilities of beauty as it had possessed had been undeveloped, and even when Sir William brought his young bride there, he had not expended a shilling in adorning or improving it. He had only taken up his residence there a few years after his first wife's death, and then, as now, it was little more than a rough bachelor's home. But the estate itself he sedulously improved and

cultivated, and spent much of his time in superintending these improvements, in consultations with his steward, and visits among his tenants. A few of the surrounding families called on the bride on her arrival, but their attentions were so coldly received, and so scantily acknowledged by the baronet, that they were seldom repeated.

Lady Carruthers soon found herself caged, with no hope of freedom even to beat her wings beyond the precincts of her moorland home. She did not resist. Her temperament was essentially lymphatic, and with her flowers and her novels, and the nightly game of backgammon with Sir William, and her occasional confidences with her doctor, and rides about the country on horseback with her husband, she contrived to attain a measure of content, if not happiness; and the sighs she breathed for the lover she had jilted were easily dissipated when she went

in to dinner, for a good cook was the one expensive luxury that Sir William allowed himself, and, fortunately for her, Millicent liked good cooking.

But soon the sighs grew deeper and more frequent. Two daughters were born in quick succession, just as Bertram Carruthers' calls on his father's banking book were becoming more urgent and importunate. Sir William grew more and more morose and fretful. He resented the advent of these new charges on the Brackensfell property, as if it had been an intentional annoyance on the part of his lady. Girls, too! What is the use of girls, except to eat up a huge share of what should belong to their half-brother, and bother him with improvident marriages, as Brian had nearly done, and as he, by-and-by, almost wished he had done? For the poor Millicent early lost her bloom and the little vivacity she

ever had. She had not much intelligence, no culture, no tact. She was docile as a spaniel, and as timid. She was afraid of her husband, and her very timidity provoked him, while he almost hated the children.

As years passed on, affairs grew worse. The girls were not likely to feel much affection for a father who thwarted them in all their inclinations, denied them every pleasure, grudged them the very clothes he was obliged to pay for. He knew they did not love him, and strongly distrusted his wife, as having taught them to deceive him. As age came on, he was crippled by rheumatic gout; and though he kept his wedded slave chained to his sick chamber, he could not at the same time see that these girls did not run into mischief.

They were not attractive girls either. Their education had not been neglected;

they had had accomplished governesses, and had even been “finished” for a year or two in a Parisian *pensionnat*. *Noblesse oblige*; and Sir William would never have sought to evade the duty of rearing his offspring as the females of the Carruthers’ line had been always reared. They were gentle-women, and fitted to take rank with gentle-women. But Georgina, the eldest, was like her father, lean and sallow and plain-featured, with no charm but a pair of brilliant dark eyes; and, like her father, she had a cold heart, a sharp temper, and a bitter tongue. Anne resembled her mother, though not so pretty as Lady Carruthers had been; but she was even more insipid. Sir William never transferred to his daughters any share of the affection he lavished on his son. That worthy, who was twenty-five years older than Miss Carruthers, had now reached the mature age of forty-three.

He had sown his wild oats ; and though he still preferred life in Paris, or Vienna, or Rome to the sweet domestic charms of Brackensfell, which he rarely visited, still he gambled no longer, and even gave signs of developing the penurious tastes of the spendthrift grown miser. So far well ; he would wed an heiress by-and-by, which would be even better. And Sir William's careful nursing of the Brackensfell estate had made it a thriving property. That was best.

Still, his parsimonious habits rather increased than diminished ; and he excused them, when he deigned any excuse, by pleading the necessity of saving during his life some provision for his widow and dowry for his daughters, that they might not be burdensome to their brother when he came into his inheritance. So, feeling the infirmities of his nearly eighty winters in-

creasing on him, and the charges of his physician, when telegraphed for from town, more annoying than any pains—when he was not actually writhing under them—he let Brackensfell Manor House to a wealthy millowner from Bradford, who was building a palace for himself in his own district, and wanted a temporary refuge from architects and builders, and took a quiet, old-fashioned, and comparatively inexpensive house in Stratford Place, near his doctor, where he immured his wife and daughters, who could not even solace themselves with gay promenades or shopping, since they were denied more than two bonnets a year. Georgina sat in the house and snarled. Anne utilized her dowdy bonnet by carrying it into back streets and poor dwellings, and making of it a trap with which to ensnare a curate, who likewise visited in that parish ; but of this affair Sir William knew nothing,

nor ever knew anything. They were scarcely settled in their new home when the news arrived that Bertram Carruthers had been flung from his horse in the Bois de Boulogne, and killed on the spot. The shock of this intelligence, unguardedly communicated to his father, threw the gout to his heart, and he died within the hour. He had left a will, bequeathing the trifling provision he had saved within the last three or four years to his daughters, but the will was unsigned. Everything else that he possessed was tied up in the Brackensfell estate, which was strictly entailed. And the exile, Brian Carruthers, was heir to all !

CHAPTER VI.

COUNTER-IRRITATION.

MEANTIME, the exiled Brian had pursued his devious way, "remote, unfriended, solitary, slow," with a chain of Millicent's hair round his neck, and a farewell note from her in his breast-pocket, containing the usual vows of fidelity and hopes of re-union—hopes which, on arriving at Rio Vedas, Brian was compelled to relegate to the distant period, when "something better should turn up." For his new home was not one that he could offer to an English bride. The climate, tempered by the sea-breezes, might be enjoyable enough to those who could sympathize with salamanders, and the sur-

rounding scenery, though rather monotonous, was not lacking in charm to those for whom Nature has unfailing aspects of beauty. But “the sweet shady side of Pall Mall” had more interest for Brian than the long, low coast, with its fringe of breakers on the gleaming sands ; and a young lady brought up amid the strictest proprieties of the clerical-aristocratic circle of a cathedral close would scarcely relish the society of bachelor *employés* of commercial houses, whose one aim in life was to make money as quickly as possible, to earn the promotion from their principals that would necessitate their recall home—a society varied, but little improved, by the occasional admixture of a few Portuguese or Brazilian families of the trading classes, and captains of merchant ships, all living under the laxest rules as regarded language, manners, and dress, and attended by throngs of negro slaves, and

pervaded by a mingled fragrance of tobacco, guano, and African sables.

Clearly Millicent Farquhar could not be invited to join her lover at Rio Vedas ; so, with a sigh, he wrote a tender letter to her, in which he tried to speak hopefully of the better things that were in store for both, and an urgent letter to Sir William, pressing him to keep his friend at the Foreign Office always on the alert, to watch for the better things and transfer them, as he had promised, to the expectant consul.

Neither letter received any reply ; but Brian was good at waiting. Then, in a few months, came a line from his uncle's bankers, informing him that his debts were fully paid, and that as long as he resided in Rio Vedas his drafts upon them would be honoured to a stated amount, which would be sufficient, with his official emoluments, to enable him to hold a position befitting the

Government's representative in the town. This notice brought comfort to the exile ; for, he reasoned, Sir William's munificence, limited to a stay in Rio Vedas, surely meant that it would be for a brief period only, and that a better appointment, and a self (and spouse) supporting one, was near at hand.

And while he was musing thus, came a letter addressed in Bertram Carruthers' handwriting—a few lines, calling for sympathy, and enclosing a newspaper cutting, in which was announced the marriage of Sir William Carruthers with Miss Millicent Farquhar.

The blow fell crushingly on the unhappy young man. The treachery of his uncle was not the less odious that there had never been any warm affection between them. The falsehood of his betrothed was not the less bitter that his love had been born of

mere ball-room admiration. The world had become a desert to him, empty of interest or sympathy ; for his cousin had been ignorant of his engagement, and was occupied only with his own wrong, in having his inheritance diminished by possible settlements on a mercenary stepmother, who was youthful enough to threaten heavier charges on it in the future. He had no friends in the society around him, having held himself aloof from his countrymen, less from distaste for their modes of thought and feeling, than from constitutional reserve and self-absorption ; and they, in return, believing any show of cordiality unwelcome, avoided him as a haughty, “stuck-up” aristocrat, who would probably remain but a short time among them—and the shorter the better.

And he now withdrew himself further from all intercourse with them, beyond what was demanded by his few business

relations, and sunk into a brooding despondency, which, fed by his isolation and by the enervating influence of the climate, would probably soon have fitted him for the still more uncongenial society of lunatics, to which class some of his neighbours already secretly relegated him, but for a circumstance which occurred, apparently adverse, but in reality “a blessing in disguise.”

We are all familiar (at least in theory) with a remedy which doctors call “counter-irritation,” which was once thus illustrated by a wag: “Cure for a sore throat: Swallow a kitten, and pull it back by its tail.” Now, Brian’s kitten was a shark; only, instead of swallowing it, it nearly swallowed him, and it happened in this way.

One morning, before sunrise, he went down to the beach, entered a boat manned by an old negro and a lad, and ordered them to take him out to sea to bathe. They

took him a certain distance, and then roused him from his melancholy musings, to assure him that they had reached the furthest point from which he could bathe in safety, as sharks had occasionally frequented the deeper waters ahead. But to Brian, in his gloomy abstraction, to be eaten by sharks seemed but a trivial accident, and the warning was unheeded or forgotten. He was a remarkably good swimmer, and when he found himself in the water, in the enjoyment of an exercise from which, for very listlessness, he had for some weeks refrained, the cool sparkle of the waves flashed new energy into his weary frame, and he struck out gallantly, feeling as if, could he only swim far enough, he should swim out of the whirlpool of sorrow in which his very being had been submerged. As he very nearly did !

Suddenly a warning shout rang over the

water from the negro in the boat, who had been sweeping the horizon with Carruthers' glass, and was now pulling at his oars with his utmost energy to meet him. And lo ! he descried, fortunately at some distance, making towards him from an opposite direction, what he could not doubt to be—a shark ! A shark in the bloom of early fish-hood, not yet attained to its fullest size and vigour, but quite old enough materially to modify Brian's views as to "trivial accidents."

There must be something in the theory of "latent energies," for never before or since did Carruthers exhibit such a frenzy of mental determination and muscular activity as he did that morning in his effort to regain his boat. It was a hairbreadth escape. The monster had overtaken him ; there was a hospitable "come inside" grin on his countenance as he turned over, after

the manner of sharks, to enforce the invitation, just as Brian bounded into the boat like any flying-fish, and fell breathless and bleeding. Bleeding? Yes, verily, he was saved by a supreme effort, but the monster, *in transitu*, had confiscated his great toe!

Needless to affirm that the amputation had not been performed with surgical skill, though with more than surgical celerity; and by the time that efficient aid could be procured, to amend the rough and ready method of the piscine operator, pain, loss of blood, and partial exposure to a blazing sun had brought the wretched victim into such a condition, that, had the alternative substitution been possible, he would probably have preferred his toe to his sweetheart.

Violent fever and inflammation ensued, and then a period of utter prostration, prolonged by the weakness of the nervous system induced by previous mental suffering.

But there was compensation. English, Portuguese, and native families vied with each other in kindly solicitude for the helpless sufferer, whose social shortcomings were forgotten and forgiven in his youth and loneliness. There was no romance of black-eyed señoritas bending over his bed and damping his pillow with salt tears (he had had enough of salt water), and the "Sisters" who nursed him were not young and lovely, but plain-featured and very fat; but kind faces watched over him, kind voices soothed him, cordial sympathy welcomed him back to health.

Few of them were polished; all were brotherly and friendly. Carruthers had never been made so much of before, and by the time he had quite recovered, he had ceased to feel himself an alien and an exile in Rio Vedas, or to look impatiently for a promotion which never came. The indolent

far niente life of the sunny land suited him well. To lounge all day in a verandah, smoking the best of cigars, looking out upon the glittering waters (mildly anathematizing the sharks therein), attended by obsequious negroes, and smiling at his friends' efforts to amuse him with the latest witticisms current in Rio Vedas, or turning over the books, papers, and other reviews which he took care should be liberally supplied to him from a London bookseller—this he found pleasant enough, after a time, to silence regret and dim remembrance.

I believe that, even in London, it has been found possible for a young man to lead a life of smoking, lounging, and doing nothing. But it costs more in town! Brian could enjoy these luxuries in Rio Vedas without fear of duns or similar inconveniences. The allowance his uncle made him was positive wealth there, and even

billiard-playing was not ruinous, as gaming was a vice from which the young representatives of the mercantile houses were guarded by the necessities of their position.

And so weeks and months glided on, and year succeeded year, until our modern Rip van Winkle aroused himself one day, with a smile and a sigh, to the consciousness that his youth was gone, and that he had dreamed away twenty-five years in Rio Vedas. But his early love-dream was gone too. A man declines to cherish romantic sentiment for an aunt, and Brian had been “jilted.” That little vulgar word never ceased to rankle in his mind with a persistence that was in itself a proof that both his love and his sorrow had been more superficial than he knew. It may be that he had found consolation in lighter attachments and less holy bonds, for morality was not up to a high standard among either

Europeans or Brazilians at Rio Vedas, and Brian's did not rise above it. That he had not grown coarse in mind or manners during his long banishment was owing partly to natural refinement, partly to a temperament which was slow to receive external impressions, and, in some degree, to the improved tone of his society, which had been continually recruited from the advancing civilization of the commercial ranks in England, by men of higher culture, birth, and breeding than he had found there on his arrival.

Brian Carruthers, at eight and forty, was still what young ladies call "an interesting looking man." He was rather below middle height, slender, but well proportioned ; and the slight limp occasioned by that shark's voracity was so much in keeping with the natural pensiveness of his manner, that it took nothing from its grace. His close-cropped hair and small head and delicate

features gave him a certain youthfulness of appearance, notwithstanding the long grey moustache (with no accompaniment of beard or whiskers) and the bronzed complexion ; and in the large blue eyes there was a look that might well be taken for pathetic, though in reality it was only absent and introspective. In his solitary life among the natives and slaves, who were ignorant of any language but their own, he had contracted a habit of murmuring quite audibly the thought which was passing through his mind—a practice which afforded so much amusement to his countrymen, that they were careful never to warn him of it, as, when his blue eyes dwelt with peculiar intensity on the face of some companion, while he thoughtfully caressed his drooping moustache, the fixed attention which was so flattering to the speaker was likely to be followed by a murmured com-

ment which had a very different meaning. The candid circle in Madame de Genlis' Palace of Truth might have welcomed him among them as an *habitué* to their customs.

Such was Brian Carruthers when the startling communication reached him from his uncle's lawyers that he had become, through unforeseen accident, the heir to the family title and to a prosperous and unencumbered estate. The "something better" had turned up at last !

CHAPTER VII.

GEORGINA.

“ WELL, thank Heaven ! that’s over, and will not happen again ! ” and Miss Carruthers threw down the book which had been for some minutes in her hand, with the pages still uncut, and laid her head on the chair cushions with a long sigh of contentment. Lady Carruthers looked up from the vase of half-withered flowers she was arranging on a table beside her. She was a woman whose beauty had been of the kind which consists more of colouring than of form, and seldom outlasts youth’s earliest springtime. She was worn and sallow now ; her face wore a half-anxious, half-sullen expression,

and her figure was decidedly overblown and shapeless.

“ Glad what is over ? ” she inquired.

“ Well,” answered Georgina, “ I mean—— But do throw away those shabby flowers, mamma. We need not keep up our penurious habits now. Brian will bring you a fresher bouquet presently.”

“ Glad *what* is over ? ” repeated Lady Carruthers, persistently.

“ Why, this detestable wedding of Anne’s, with its sentimental foolery, and its dulness and dowdiness ; it might have been a maid-servant’s wedding ! ”

“ You are unreasonable, Georgina,” remonstrated her mother. “ In our deep mourning, such a double mourning too, we could but have a very private wedding. And in any case, a great display would have been absurd, since your sister has only married a poor country clergyman, and

except for Brian's generosity there could have been no wedding at all."

Lady Carruthers said truly. It would have been gall and wormwood to a sensitive woman to find herself left dependent on the liberality of the man she had wronged for any share of the fortune for which she had sacrificed him. But Lady Carruthers was not sensitive, and when she found that there was but the most meagre provision for her, scarcely sufficient to support herself and her daughters, certainly not to afford her youngest and favourite child the assistance without which her marriage must be indefinitely postponed, she calmly wrote to her former lover, enclosing Sir William's unsigned will, and pleading that, in justice, a mere legal informality ought not to prevent his heir from carrying out his wishes.

No answer came from Sir Brian; but from his lawyers Lady Carruthers received

the satisfactory announcement of "instructions" from their client to arrange a settlement on his uncle's widow and daughters, considerably more liberal than they would have been entitled to claim under the will had it been properly executed. Thereupon Lady Carruthers wrote a second letter to her quondam sweetheart—a grateful, aunt-like letter, in which she told him of Anne's engagement, and invited him, in the names of herself and daughters, to come to them immediately on his arrival in England, and claim his position as head of the family by giving away the bride.

An invitation which Sir Brian, after some hesitation, accepted, though not until he had lingered at Rio Vedas much longer than any other man in his position would have cared to do. He duly presented himself at the wedding, and gave away his cousin to her expectant curate, and it was

to this ceremony, now ten days past, that Genevra Farquhar had been invited to officiate as bridesmaid.

“I know, I know,” replied Georgina to her mother’s remark. “Of course it was all right, but none the less dull, and Anne’s sentimental ‘gush’ over her bumpkin bridegroom was most ridiculous; and so, mamma, both you and I may rejoice that it is over and done with.”

“At least, Georgie, your cousins, Sir Brian and my niece, did not seem to find it at all ridiculous. They both appeared quite interested. By the way, talking of my niece, I hope that her people quite understand that her visit is strictly limited to a month? With all our arrangements in hand for our visit to Paris, she is rather in my way as it is. I never could clearly understand why you insisted on my inviting her at all.”

“ Make yourself easy, mamma,” answered Miss Carruthers ; “ Miss Farquhar’s friends will not spare her to you for so long as a month. She is to return home in a fortnight at latest. I have clearly explained to you why I wished you to ask her here, but you were too much engrossed with Anne’s trousseau to pay me any attention.”

“ I can give you my whole attention now,” said Lady Carruthers. “ Why did you make me write to Mrs. Farquhar, and at such a time too ? ”

“ Just the right time, mamma. It was an opportunity of renewing your relations with Jenny and her people, and of offering her a graceful compliment besides. If you had not liked her when you saw her, you had done all that could be expected of you, and could retire from any further intimacy without awkwardness.”

“ But why revive the relationship at all ? ”

“Oh, mamma,” rejoined Georgina, uncivilly, “your density is aggravating. Cannot you see that, immured as we have been by my loving papa, that we might cost him as little as possible, and left almost beggars, we have absolutely no friends—except this dear old lady we are going to in Paris—who will trouble themselves to ask us to their houses; and we are not likely to afford to keep one of our own.”

“Unless you marry well,” suggested the mother.

“As I mean to do,” said Miss Carruthers, candidly. “But I must have some stand-point in society first, and I begin with my relations. My uncle, Dr. Farquhar, was a distinguished man in his day, and his little daughter has a position, or ought to have, in the county society where she lives. She will be an heiress, too, in a small way, and altogether she is worth cultivating; and the

Grange will be a convenient place for me to stay at when you are with Anne, and I am on the wing."

"I do not see much in your policy," answered Lady Carruthers, a little wearily. "You could take a shorter cut to fortune another way."

"I know," laughed Georgina. "You mean by captivating my cousin Brian? No, thanks; I have not the courage to face ridicule, and what would be more ridiculous than for a girl to marry an old lover of her mother's?"

"You ought never to have heard that story, Georgina," remarked Lady Carruthers, severely.

"Then," replied the daughter, "you should never have retained your old maid in your service. Moreover, I never had a chance of winning Brian. My face is against that."

“Your face? You are not very plain,” said Lady Carruthers, doubtfully, “and you are one whom the men call a fine girl.”

“Shall I tell you?” said Georgina, who secretly resented her mother’s qualified approval of her personal charms. “Yes, I think I will. You were not present at my first interview with my cousin Brian. I was alone in the drawing-room when he first arrived, and of course I went forward to greet him with all the warmth of welcome one naturally shows to the representative of the family, who has been so truly generous as Brian has been to my sister and me. Well, you know his way; he held both my hands in his, abstractedly—I do not believe he knew what he was holding—and his large grey eyes dwelt on my face in silence for so long, that I thought he was preparing an oration expressive of extra-cousinly

affection, and then he slowly murmured, 'She is the image of her d——d father!'"

Lady Carruthers was shocked.

"You ought not to repeat such words," she said; "they were not meant for your ears or for mine. I cannot think where Brian contracted that horrid habit of speaking in stage 'asides;' he never had it when I knew him."

"Possibly not," answered Georgina drily; "there is time enough to contract a good many odd habits between three and twenty and eight and forty. However, you can understand now that, my cousin's memory being so retentive, he is not likely to cherish a grand passion for me; and that fact being fully recognized, I proceed to suggest another and more feasible method of utilizing my relations."

"I do not see," began Lady Carruthers.

"No, mamma; you never do see, unless

I open your eyes. Where is Genevra just now?"

"Brian called for her not an hour ago to take her a drive round the Park, while we were at Redmayne's."

"What were Brian and Jenny doing in the back drawing-room all the morning yesterday?"

"He was reading the last new poem to her. He is very kind in trying to amuse the child, for I am afraid that we rather neglect her."

"I am not neglecting her—I am utilizing her." And as Lady Carruthers still looked puzzled, she continued, "We leave town in a fortnight. Brian will betake himself to his new estate; he will marry some lady who, whatever may be her predilections, is not likely to have any for her poor relations, who thus lose all hold on him. But if he weds your niece——"

“Georgina!” almost screamed her mother.

“If he weds your niece,” proceeded the young lady calmly, “then the family tie is strongly knit, with all its contingent advantages; and thus, by doing my utmost to further such a marriage, I should, if I succeed, utilize both my relations. Well,” resumed Miss Carruthers, as her mother continued silent, “do you approve of this plan of mine for turning defeat into victory?”

“I cannot say that I do, Georgina; the disparity in age is too great.”

“Not greater than——?”

“Yes, greater by four years; and if it were the same, still my married life, as you know, was not so bright that I should propose to make it a precedent for Jenny’s.”

“Oh,” answered Georgina, in whose character filial reverence was by no means a salient feature, “but Brian is not such a

Blue Beard as Sir William was ; he will be kindness itself to his young wife."

"However," continued Lady Carruthers, "there seems to be something selfish and heartless in encouraging such a marriage, merely for our own interest. Genevra is a child, young even for her years. I think her friends should be consulted, at least."

Georgina perceived that her confidence had been premature, and hastened to retrace her steps.

"Her friends ? They could but be pleased with such a brilliant match for a little country maid like her ; and in any case, if she is a child, she is a spoiled child, who will take her own way, whether her friends approve or not. Interference does no good in such matters, and would certainly offend Brian. It may come to nothing."

"I think it will come to nothing," said Lady Carruthers. "I believe your cousin's

attentions to Jenny are prompted simply by a wish to amuse the child ; his manner to her is not in the least lover-like."

" And you ought to know," said Georgina, with the faintest possible sneer.

" So," continued her mother, " my advice to you is not to put such nonsense into Genevra's head. If Brian has any thought of the kind, he will forget all about it when she leaves us. He never does anything in a hurry."

And, so saying, Lady Carruthers walked away to prepare herself for a shopping expedition, and studiously avoided further allusion to Georgina's politic views.

They were not without foundation. The wedding of Miss Anne Carruthers had been, as her sister had said, a very uninteresting one. The bridal party had consisted only of the mother and father of the bride—represented by Sir Brian as the head of the

family—the bride and bridegroom, and the bridesmaids, Georgina and Genevra. On the bride's departure, Lady Carruthers and her daughter had been too much occupied with their own preparations for leaving town to take much trouble to amuse their youthful guest, and at first Carruthers took that task on himself from pure good nature, which presently gave way to more personal motives. The most pressing duty urged upon him, on his arrival in England, by his lawyers, and the few friends who had welcomed him, was the duty of marrying and giving an heir to the title, which would otherwise become extinct with him. It was not an old title—all the more reason it should have the chance of becoming older ; and although Brian cared little for the title, and not at all for marriage, he accepted the suggestion, and dwelt on it, in his slow, persistent fashion, until he almost imagined

that he had himself originated it. But his early experience had made him distrustful, and he shrank as he pictured to himself the hungry mothers and scheming daughters of fashion who would be soon in full pursuit of him as a prey. And he gradually awoke to the perception that in the little budding maiden, whose freshness and naïve enjoyment of the scenes around her had so amused and interested him, and whose frank and cordial recognition of his efforts to please her had so gratified him, there was the very ideal of a suspicious Cœlebs—an innocent country girl, too young to be fancy-tainted, pretty enough to please, and brought up in ignorance of worldly cunning and selfish aims. It did not occur to him that this ignorance might plead against him, as blinding her to the advantages of a marriage with a man thrice her age, for he never thought of himself as old. His silent,

uneventful years had glided by, like the noiseless lapse of a dull river, which reflects always the same scene, unbroken by a ripple or a wave ; and, in his youth, he had been voluntarily deserted by his love for a man much older than he was now.

She was pure from any thought or dream of passion, and it would be his care, by surrounding her with all “sweet observance,” to keep her so ; for Sir Brian was indisposed for ardours on either side. He did not fall in love—he walked into it, and, so far from feeling impatient with Miss Farquhar’s evident unconsciousness of his attentions, he was quite contented to “take his time,” and to admire his blossom with the dew on it—the frank eyes which met his fixed gaze with no bashful avoidance ; the dimpling smiles of welcome ; the playful familiarity, unchecked by the blushing reserve which, sooner or later, love would

bring with it; and Sir Brian was willing that it should be later, only not *too* late.

And thus Jenny, who had been received by her aunt and cousins with kindness, but with no warmth, had found her first experience of bridal festivity decidedly disappointing, and would have found her London visit equally so but for the baronet's untiring efforts to amuse her. And as days went by, and the engagements of her hostesses left her more and more to her own resources, she began to watch eagerly for the daily visit of her new friend, who always came with the proposal of a drive or walk on fine mornings to some fresh exhibition or entertainment, and would sit with her for hours on inveterately wet afternoons, reading some new poem aloud to her, and answering the questions with which she plied him about the customs, climate, and products of the distant land which had been

so long his home. Especially she was interested in the dreadful adventure of the shark, which might have cost him his life, and had actually cost him a toe ! The slight limp, which might have seemed a disadvantage in the eyes of some girls, became an absolute charm in Jenny's, who might have looked with comparative indifference upon Jonah as a prophet, but would have been wrapt in admiration of him when he had been swallowed by a fish ! Once or twice Sir Brian ventured an attempt to enlist her sympathy with him on a more romantic subject, by the vaguest, most distant allusions to his early disappointment, to the treachery of the woman he had loved. But it would not have answered his purpose to dwell too much on an " ower true tale," and he was secretly pleased to see that it involved but little response from the as yet unawakened chord of sentiment in

Genevra's by no means sentimental nature. She pitied his loneliness in exile, but she liked better to hear about the shark !

Not only did the idea of Sir Brian as a lover never occur to Jenny, but the idea of any lover at all had not as yet presented itself to her imagination except as a very vague and distant probability. She had been almost entirely restricted to the society of two elderly ladies, who would have considered it a kind of profanity to suggest such probabilities to a girl of her age,—a girl who might, Mrs. Farquhar said—who ought to, Mrs. Burnes declared—have been in the nursery. The few works of imaginative literature that fell in her way were a complete series of Sir Walter Scott's novels, which had belonged to her own mother ; and these were eagerly devoured. But the chief interest of these bewitching tales depends but little on the love-making, and

no girl could be tempted into the torrid atmosphere of passion by her sympathy with Edith Plantagenet or Catherine of Perth. Indeed, Jenny's admiration of these heroines was always greater for the stateliest and coldest among them. Diana Vernon, Edith Bellenden, Flora M'Donald, would have been her models, if she had cared to choose one; and she was firmly of opinion that that dear old Constable de Lacy was much to be preferred to his successful nephew. Her studies in poetry, of which she was passionately fond, were not so limited to a single writer; but, as yet, the charm of verse had been the charm of its music only, and had awakened no deeper chord in response. Moreover, a greater joy than any she found in literature existed for her in the beauty of woodland scenery, in the creature life in forest and fields. While eagerly searching for a rare fern or flower, or peering

with rapturous admiration into a nest of little blind and naked harvest mice, the most thrilling romance would have fallen flat on her attention. But, you see, she was only sixteen, and the most exciting love-stories are rather wanting in point to ears on which no living lover has ever breathed their interpretation.

Sir Brian did not misread her apparent absorption in his talk of his foreign experience. He did not for a moment imagine that Ginevra was in love with him. He believed—as men in such circumstances are prone to do—that her capacity for love was dormant and undeveloped; and he was glad that it should be so. A pure, calm affection was all that was requisite in a wife and mother of future heirs. She was too young for worldly self-interest, too innocent to dream of any hardships in the watchfulness with which he would guard her from

worldly perils. If he must marry he had better not lose any more time. Once in the vortex of the husband-hunters, he might be swept off his feet and whirled into—— Sir Brian glanced at fat Lady Carruthers and lean, sharp-faced Georgina, and shuddered.

CHAPTER VIII.

HER FIRST OFFER.

THE day arrived which was to be the last Brian and Genevra would spend together in town. He was to start for Brackensfell the next day on business, and in a day or two she was to return home. It was a bright, sunny May morning, with a bitter east wind. Genevra found it charming and so exhilarating ; but poor Sir Brian shivered in his rugs and furs when he drove up to Stratford Place as usual to take Jenny out for her early drive, and he was unhappy when she said it was a shame to waste the rare town sunshine under any roof. Would he take her a walk in the parks or Gardens ? But,

as he ruefully acquiesced, she suddenly bethought her of the Zoo, which she had never seen, and he eagerly caught at the proposal to drive there. There were sheltered corners there, kept warmed for the foreign creatures from sunnier climes, and he promised himself secretly that very little of the morning should be spent in the open air.

Little Jenny, a born naturalist, was in her glory at the Zoo. She was chiefly interested in the animals which, strange to her, were familiar to her companion, and she eagerly questioned him about their haunts and habits ; but Sir Brian cared nothing about such doings, and his replies left much to be desired in the way of scientific accuracy, though Genevra never suspected that he was drawing on his imagination for the facts which he so confidently affirmed. “ If she could only see a shark ! ” But sharks

were not among the agreeable monsters cherished at the Zoo, and Sir Brian did not repine at the omission.

“Were there camels or elephants at Rio Vedas ?”

And when Sir Brian shook his head, she looked disappointed, and glanced wistfully towards a little wired court they had just passed, in a very draughty corner, containing a number of chilly guinea-pigs.

“No camels ?”

“No, Jenny ; but there were splendid birds — humming-birds and parrots, all colours. Shall we go into the aviary, and I will show you some like them ?”

And to the aviary they proceeded, where the wily baronet secured a seat for his young friend and himself in the well-warmed house, and watched her, as from time to time she quitted his side, to flit among the gay-plumaged birds that fluttered and

screamed round her, not unfrequently addressing her in a word or two of Spanish or Portuguese, learnt of the sailors on their voyage, at which Sir Brian laughed, but did not propose to interpret. He slowly pulled his long moustache, watched Genevra, and mused. It was warm and pleasant there ; but oh, the cutting wind they would have to face when they left the Gardens ! And his journey to-morrow ; the dull, desolate, wind-swept mansion among the bleak fells of Cumberland—the home of his boyhood, it is true, but a home that had never been home-like to him, the orphan relative of its heir ! And a vision arose before his dreamy fancy of a very different home. Not at Rio Vedas ; he felt that he could never take up his life there again ; but in some isle of the blest, where he could bask evermore in sunshine, without duties or cares or social worries, with his books and his cigars, and

—since marriage was insisted on as a necessity of his new position—with an innocent girl-wife, who would ask for no amusement but in her pets and her flowers, of which no winters would bereave her, until the advent of the required heir condoned in his neighbours' eyes his evasion of his local responsibilities as the owner of Brackensfell.

At that point in his meditations Genevra presented her last piece of biscuit to a blue macaw, which had for some time been rewarding her bounty with the most opprobrious epithets (in Portuguese), and returned to Sir Brian, who rose to offer her his seat on the bench, and placed himself again beside her.

“But there are no humming-birds here, Sir Brian,” she said. “You promised to show me humming-birds.”

“No, Jenny,” he answered; “you can only see such fragile creatures as those by seeking them in their natural homes.”

“ Oh, how I wish I could ! How I long to visit those places, with their delicious climate and their exquisite scenery, and all the lovely birds and wild things. If papa had lived he would have taken me with him there, and to many other foreign lands, which I shall never see now.”

“ You may see them yet,” answered the baronet, looking reflectively at her. “ Some other friend may take you there.”

“ No chance at all,” returned Jenny, despondingly. “ Mamma says she could not live through a sea voyage, and I have no brothers with whom I could go.”

“ You can go,” suggested Carruthers, slowly, “ with—a husband ?”

Genevra’s eyes brightened, and she drew a long breath, as if a delightful vista had suddenly opened before her, but it ended in a sigh.

“ That must be such a very long time hence,” was her naïve reply.

Sir Brian smiled—he had a very pleasant smile—and had there been another soul besides themselves in the aviary, that smile would have been his sole rejoinder. But for the moment they were alone with the evil-tongued cockatoos and macaws, and the situation was too strong for him. He leaned tenderly towards her, and took her hand in his.

“ Let me be your husband, Genevra, and we will go and see the humming-birds together.”

CHAPTER IX.

GEORGINA IS AMUSED.

MISS CARRUTHERS glanced up with a languid curiosity as Genevra entered the room, while Lady Carruthers also looked at her with a newly awakened interest, and to both of them it appeared that she looked less bright than usual.

“ Alone, Jenny ? ” said Georgina. “ What have you done with my cousin ? ”

“ Sir Brian left me at the Zoo,” answered Miss Farquhar. “ He said he had a business engagement at his lawyer’s office ; but he will be with you this evening.”

“ Of course,” remarked Georgina, significantly ; but Genevra took no notice.

“ You look tired, my child,” said her aunt. “ I am afraid you have not amused yourself so much as usual this morning.”

“ And no wonder,” observed Miss Carruthers. “ The idea of any girl wasting a whole morning in town, in those horrid Gardens, among a lot of inodorous animals ! Why, Genevra, you might just as well have stayed in the country, and visited one of Van Amberg’s travelling shows !”

“ I like looking at wild beasts much better than shopping,” answered Jenny ; “ but I am tired of both to-day. The town is so noisy. Are there no letters for me, aunt ?”

“ There is one that came just after you went out, dear. It is on your dressing-table.”

Miss Farquhar immediately left the room ; and Georgina remarked, impressively—

“ Something has happened ! I have never

heard Jenny complain of being tired before. Has she refused Brian, do you think ? ”

Lady Carruthers’ rejoinder was not sympathetic. “ I do not believe he has been such a goose as to ask her. It is all a foolish fancy of your own, Georgina.”

“ If you say that, mamma,” replied her daughter, irreverently, “ I shall think you are jealous, and have forgotten that Brian is within the prohibited degree now. However, I will have Miss Farquhar’s secret at once, if she has got one. There is no time to waste in speculation ; ” and she rose accordingly, and proceeded to her cousin’s room.

Genevra had seated herself at her dressing-table, and, without taking off her bonnet, began to read her mother’s letter. It was the usual kind of letter that she had daily received from Mrs. Farquhar since she left home—loving regrets for her absence ;

tender cautions against over-fatigue or taking cold ; assurances of the well-being of all her friends, human and animal ; gentle reproaches for the extreme brevity of her own letters, and affectionate entreaties to write punctually in reply.

Jenny glanced over the pages more absently than she was wont to do, and then let them fall from her hand to the floor, where they lay unheeded, while she sat trying to restore order to her own thoughts, bewildered by the unexpected occurrence at the Zoo.

Sir Brian had rightly conjectured that, as yet, Genevra's maiden fancy had been stirred by no dream of husband or lover, and assuredly it had never occurred to her to connect the idea of Sir Brian Carruthers with any such dreams, until now that he had unmistakably proposed to her, and —she was not at all sure that she had not

accepted him ; she was almost sure that *he* believed she had ! In the confusion and bewilderment of her surprise, she had been struck dumb, and not one syllable would rise to her lips. Naturally, the lover had taken her silence for a bashful consent. People came and went around them—there was no opportunity for exchange of sentiment on either side ; but she remembered something of a tender pressure of the hand he held in his, some whispered words of gratitude and devotion, as he led her through the Gardens, and handed her into the carriage, standing bareheaded as she was driven away ; for Sir Brian's foreign notions of the etiquette in such cases forbade him from accompanying her home, as he would otherwise have done, and he respected her emotion, though he misunderstood its cause.

“ Could this be,” Jenny asked herself in doubt and perplexity—“ could this be a

betrothal?" What might have been her answer to her lover, had she previously reflected on the subject, or if she had given any answer at all, even at the moment, she did not ask herself. Her position, though unforeseen and, so to speak, unintended, was not without its charm. Her heart fluttered a little, with childish vanity, at the homage offered her by a man whom Lady Carruthers and her daughters looked up to, deferred to, and evidently respected. And yet—and yet——

A light tap at the door, and Georgina entered. Her quick glance took in the situation at once—little Genevra, still in her walking-dress, leaning back in her chair, abstracted and pale; the mother's letter lying, where it had dropped from her careless hand, at her feet; and the sudden crimson that rushed over her face, as her cousin's significant smile greeted her. For-

tunately, Sir Brian's trick of monologue did not run in the family, or Miss Carruthers' first audible utterance would have been—

“ *What* an old fool he has made of himself ! ”

Instead of which, she clasped her arms round the blushing girl, and murmured caressingly—

“ Tell me all about it, Jenny darling. I always knew how it would be.”

But Jenny was herself again at once. She was unaccustomed to “ promiscuous gush,” and hated it thoroughly. She shook herself free from her cousin's embrace, and answered coldly, if not very grammatically—

“ I have nothing ‘ would be ’ to tell you about.”

But Miss Carruthers was not easily repulsed. “ Will you deny that Brian has proposed to you this morning ? ”

Jenny was silent.

“Oh, you happy girl ! And you have said ‘Yes’ ?”

Still no answer.

“Now, Jenny, don’t be reserved with your only relatives. I *know* you have accepted my cousin. You could not have the cruelty to refuse him !”

“And, pray, why not ?” inquired Jenny, beginning to untie her bonnet-strings, and stooping to pick up her mother’s letter.

Georgina cast a sidelong look at her, and her lips trembled with the effort to suppress a smile, but she answered demurely—

“I overheard—I could not help overhearing—some words of Brian’s conversation with you in the back drawing-room the other day, from which I inferred that he was telling you of the great sorrow of his life, that had kept him so long away from England. Now, was he not ?”

“He told me something of a friend who

had betrayed him, and married the lady he was engaged to," answered Genevra. "Did you know the lady, Georgie? Did you not grieve with him?"

"Did I?" exclaimed Georgie. "Why, it was before"—"I was born," she was going to say, but checked herself in time, and substituted for it—"before I knew my cousin. But I was going to say, Jenny, that you never could be so cruel as to refuse Brian, when he looks to you to make him happy?"

Jenny lifted her long eyelashes, and turned solemn eyes on Miss Carruthers' face. "It would be a great trust, would it not?" she said.

"But one that you have accepted, I am sure," answered Georgie, who was choking with laughter, and hardly able to control herself. So adding, "There, I'll not tease you any more. Of course, Brian told you

that he dines here to-day? Lie down and rest; Maxwell will come to you in time to see you dressed for dinner," she gave her a hasty kiss, and ran downstairs to her mother, when she threw herself into a chair, and burst into a peal of laughter.

" You have been at some mischief, Georgina," said Lady Carruthers, looking up from her work, " for nothing else amuses you so much."

" Who would not laugh, mamma? Fancy! that child positively asked me if I had not grieved with Brian in his first love disappointment!"

" Who told her of it?" asked Lady Carruthers, looking annoyed.

" Brian himself told her—merely, as I judge, to enlist her sympathies for the heart sorrows which are only—I *must* laugh—only a quarter of a century old!"

" Well, well," said Lady Carruthers, im-

patiently ; “ I suppose Brian does not date his memories as he does his letters. Probably Jenny thought his disappointment more recent. She does not seem to consider him so venerable as you do, Georgina, to whom it appears quite ridiculous that he could ever have been young.”

“ Because,” answered Georgie, “ she is too young herself to form much idea of age in her new relations to her first lover. If she had ever received admiration from young men, she would have been quicker in observing the grey hairs in my cousin’s moustache.”

“ But, Georgina, is it really gone so far ? ”

“ Yes, mother ; it has gone so far that you must be prepared to descend to the rank of Dowager Lady Carruthers. Console yourself with the reflection that you will be Brian’s aunt *a plus beau titre* henceforth ; that

your niece will make a good match ; and your daughter will reign over the young *ménage*, so as speedily to secure a better one for herself.”

“ You may find yourself mistaken in *that* calculation, my dear,” answered her mother. “ Genevra will not always be a baby, and I doubt if either Brian or you will find her so easily ruled.”

“ As if Brian would ever rule any one ! ” laughed Georgina. “ But we will adjourn further discussion, for here comes Maxwell to summon me to try on that new dress. We have not too much time, remember, if we are to leave for Paris next week, and send Jenny home on Thursday.”

“ And that reminds me—— ” said Lady Carruthers.

But the young lady had quitted the room with her maid ; and, with a sigh, the mother was fain to follow.

But Genevra did not "lie down," as her cousin had advised her. That lady's effusive sympathy had rather irritated than softened her. After all, there was nothing to call forth so much sentimentality in the simple fact that a gentleman, neither young nor romantic, had proposed to gratify her desire to travel and see all the wonders of which she had so often read by becoming her husband and guide. That was the right view to take of the matter. Why, Sir Brian and she had been alone together every day for the last fortnight, and never a word of love had he breathed to her ! If he had, she would have hated him. She despised such silly stuff. It was, as Miss Carruthers said, "a trust" that he had reposed in her, and which she had—accepted ? She was not quite sure ; but if she had, she was ready to fulfil it with dignity and fidelity. Had not Mrs. Burnes often said, how

honoured a woman should feel when a man asks her to preside over his home, to wear his name? Hitherto she had always been treated as a child ; how grateful she should be to Sir Brian for such a proof of respectful devotion ! Of course, she must feel very happy and proud, but Georgie had no right to assume that everything was settled and arranged. There was her dear mother's opinion to be consulted first. Should she write to her to-night? No, she thought not. Jenny disliked letter-writing. Indeed, she had no correspondents, and Mrs. Farquhar, since she came to town, had been her first. She decided that it would be better to defer her confidence until her return home ; there were so many things she had to tell her mother then. She would talk over this with her, among the rest. And suddenly a new emotion surged over the girl's heart and seemed to sweep away

everything else—a passionate yearning to be in her sweet home again, in the quiet of the beautiful woodlands. How lovely they must be looking now, in the fresh burst of their May verdure ! She was tired of town, of the hurry and bustle and noise and gloom, and the crowds of people all strange to her, and these wearying shops that Lady Carruthers and her daughter were so fond of. It had all amused her with its novelty at first ; but now, oh, how she longed to be at home again ! As for Anne's wedding, it had been less interesting to her than many a rustic bridal of which she had been an eagerly welcomed and honoured witness. No one had seemed to care whether she was there or not ; they worried her about her dress ; and Anne's bridegroom was a stupid, plain young man, and they sat in a corner, with the lover's arm round his lady's waist, and her head

on his shoulder. How she would loathe a lover who behaved like that ! Genevra was not one who would be lavish of affection to strangers. Lady Carruthers had shown no desire to win her niece's love, and Jenny was entirely indifferent to her. From Georgina she felt something like repulsion. The girl's frank nature recoiled from the worldly insincerity that she rather felt than saw, from the cold sneering manner, scarcely veiled by affected playfulness, and alternating with caresses, which Jenny tolerated, but never returned. No, she did not care for her new relatives, nor for their ways. Sir Brian had been invariably nice and kind to her. But for him she could not have stayed so long as she had done in Stratford Place ; and although he was polite to his cousin and her mother, she did not think he cared more for them than she did herself. Jenny's brains were unaccustomed to dwell

on such “social topics” as these ; she felt quite confused, and longed more than ever to be in her mother’s arms again. Only two days now !

CHAPTER X.

A KISS POSTPONED.

PUNCTUALITY is called “the courtesy of kings.” It should be no less the courtesy of baronets; but it was one in which Sir Brian was notoriously deficient, although he was never designedly so. He could not understand how it was that he was always ready for his appointment five or ten minutes too soon, and yet always arrived ten or fifteen minutes too late. The reason simply was that he passed the intervening period in “mooning,” from which he only aroused himself to find that the time of grace had been greatly exceeded, and had to rush

away in a hurry at last. On this occasion he reached Stratford Place just as dinner was on the table. Lady Carruthers treated him without ceremony, and never waited for him ; while Genevra, who was perfectly regardless of etiquette when her brains were preoccupied, had seen him come as she was descending the stairs, and saw the servant follow to "announce dinner, and, with a sudden shyness, she slipped into the dining-room first, where Sir Brian, considerably to his surprise, and a little to his discomfiture, found her seated at the table, gravely contemplating the soup tureen. No sentimental or even significant greeting could take place in such circumstances ; and with a laugh from Georgina and a mild reproof from her aunt, Miss Farquhar's indecorum was passed over ; and Sir Brian, at the head of the table, with Lady Carruthers on his right hand and Georgina on his left, was effectually

detarded from offering any expressive attention to the young lady beyond.

As was his custom when they dined alone, he followed his hostess into the drawing-room after dinner, but his recalcitrant sweetheart had again slipped away through the door of the back drawing-room. Georgina watched him as he glanced round with an air of perplexity, and broke into a merry laugh.

“Stole away, Brian !” she said. “It is really too bad of Jenny. But never mind ; you shall have her all to yourself presently, if you will only make a frank confession.”

Then Lady Carruthers, plaintively : “Surely, Georgina, you are not accusing your cousin of any wish to withhold his confidence from us, whom it so nearly regards ?”

Brian looked from one to the other, and said nothing.

“We have not been *quite* blind,” resumed Georgina. “Mamma and I were only this morning congratulating each other that our family ties will be more closely knit than ever, for,” she added maliciously, “mamma will be *doubly* your aunt now.”

“But,” interposed Lady Carruthers, impatiently, “are we to understand that you have formally proposed to my niece, and that she has accepted you?”

Sir Brian hesitated. “Well, yes, I believe I may say that she has done me the honour to accept me, subject, I suppose, to the usual reservation—if her mother approves; and, until that is settled, I think it would be best not to discuss the subject even between ourselves.”

“You can count upon our discretion,” answered Lady Carruthers, in a slightly offended tone; “but, considering that she is my own niece, and has been committed

to my care, I do not see the necessity of this reserve."

"My dear aunt!" remonstrated Sir Brian.

He had never called her "aunt" before, and she hated him for doing it now. Only such a feeling of bitterness would have prompted her to add—

"The only drawback to *my* approval of your proposal to my niece is the very great disparity in age; but I suppose it is the doom of the Farquhars to marry old men."

"Not a hard doom," retorted Sir Brian, "if they are old men of title." And then, ashamed of the taunt, he did not mend it by adding hastily, "But Genevra is too young and too innocent for such calculations."

"That she certainly is," said Georgina, eager to divert the tide of conversation, which seemed verging on dangerous breakers. "She is as innocent as a baby. You have a delightful task before you, cousin, in train-

ing her to conventional manners. My aunt Farquhar seems never to have made an effort in that direction."

"What sort of person is Mrs. Farquhar?" inquired Sir Brian.

"Oh," said Lady Carruthers, "I can tell you nothing about her. She is my brother's second wife. I never saw her. You must judge of Genevra's people for yourself, Brian."

"And unfortunately," he rejoined, "I cannot do that as soon as I could wish. I am off to-morrow morning for Brackensfell. Jephson goes with me, and can spare no other day. I have business there, which he insists on my attending to *immediately*—lawyers are so peremptory—and I shall probably not be back for a week."

"Oh, poor fellow!" laughed Georgie, a little ironically; "what a delay for an ardent wooer! And, mamma, how cruel

we are to keep him from his love on the eve of parting ! But I know Jenny is in the little anteroom downstairs, where she usually writes her letters of an evening. Go down to her, cousin, and bring her up to tea. You need not hurry," she said archly ; and added in a lower voice, as the door closed behind him, "*Festina lente !* Any hurry in you would be a portent indeed, as a fixed star racing a comet !"

But none being called for on this occasion, and the long-past outrage of the shark making itself always remembered when the sufferer descended stairs, Carruthers limped leisurely down to the anteroom, where Jenny stood gazing absently at some black sparrows on the window-sill, reproaching herself for her unaccustomed fit of bashfulness, and trying to summon up enough of maidenly dignity to grace her return to the friends she had so abruptly deserted. But

no sooner did Sir Brian enter the room alone, than (it was a bad sign for him, could he have read it) all her embarrassment at once disappeared. In the presence of her aunt and cousin she had felt awkward and shy; but there was nothing to call up blushes and palpitations in the approach of a quiet, middle-aged gentleman, who had placed before her the solemn subject of matrimony itself in the light of a joint excursion in search of humming-birds !

Sir Brian, on his part, was rather nervously in dread of another “bolt.” The bashfulness which had hurried her to the dining-table on the first occasion, might prompt a flight into the kitchen the next, and he could not well follow her there. So he cautiously restrained any lover-like advance, and presently the two were chatting away as placidly as if the little episode of the morning had occurred six months ago.

He had explained to her the necessity of his immediate departure for Brackensfell, and the possibility that he might be detained there for a week or two ; and she was telling him that in two days she was to return to Wendholm.

“ But, Jenny dear, you are surely not going to take that journey alone ? ”

“ Not quite alone,” she answered ; “ Georgina’s maid, Maxwell, is to take me, and return next day. It is really kind of my cousin to spare her ; they are so busy just now with their own travelling preparations, and, for that matter, I could go quite well by myself.”

“ It would be kinder in Lady Carruthers to keep you until some friend can come for you from your home. Why must they turn out in such a hurry ? ”

“ Because the agent has let the house for the season, and the people want to come in,

for one thing ; and my aunt wants to meet a friend in Paris, for another ; and besides—— Oh, I want to be at home again myself. I am so tired of the noise and bustle of town, and I want to see mamma !”

“ Poor Genevra !” said Brian, kindly ; “ it has been a dull visit for you. Since Anne’s wedding you have been left so much alone, and this is not a cheerful situation even. But ought I not to write at once to Mrs. Farquhar, before I start for Brackens-fell ? Then, with her permission, I can wait upon her directly my lawyer sets me free, and without returning to town.”

Genevra considered a little; then—“ Why do you wish to write to mamma ?”

Sir Brian drew his chair nearer to her and took her hand. “ My dear love, I must ask Mrs. Farquhar’s sanction to the engagement which has made me so proud

and happy. Will she give it readily, Genevra?"

"But is there any engagement?" she inquired, with such a perplexed look in her blue eyes that Sir Brian tried to reassure her.

"Well, dear, a promise, we will say, if you like that word better—a promise," he added softly, "to brighten my hitherto sad and lonely life, as no woman can ever do, has ever done, but you."

He had touched the right chord. The little maiden looked at him gravely, and did not withdraw her hand; but she said, "*Please* don't write to mamma till I have seen her, Sir Brian—not for a day or two, at least; I have so many things to talk to her about first."

That Sir Brian's proposal should not be classed among the matters of first interest with Miss Farquhar was as unexpected as it was unflattering; but he was becoming

used to these little surprises, and, attributing them all to pure girlish innocence, was inclined to dwell with peculiar satisfaction on that undoubted characteristic of his youthful *fiancée*. So, after some hesitation, he consented to wait to address Mrs. Farquhar until Jenny should give him her permission to do so. “But only a few days, Genevra; I cannot promise longer than that.”

“Perhaps,” suggested Jenny, with quite unconscious irony, “you had better wait until you have finished all your business at Brackensfell, and then you can come, if you like, and see mamma. It would be ever so much better than writing.”

“No, dear; that will not do. I must have Mrs. Farquhar’s permission to call on her.” He paused, fixing his slow gaze on her, and stroking his moustache, but, for once, without uttering his stage “aside.” “Well, Genevra, if it must be so, I will

give you, say, three days for all these preliminary chats with your mother. I can get through the most pressing affairs at Brackensfell in that time ; then I will run down for a day or so to London, and shall expect to find a letter from you at my club, enclosing Mrs. Farquhar's permission for me to visit Wendholm before I return to Cumberland. Will that do ?" and he murmured to himself, " It is not ' according to Cocker,' I am afraid."

But Jenny drew a deep breath of relief. " Then that is settled," she said. " Let us go upstairs to tea."

She rose, and would have withdrawn the hand which her lover still held ; but he rose too, still retaining it, and would have drawn her into his arms ; but she snatched it away, and recoiled from him with such a gesture of repulsion that he instantly desisted, and said submissively—

“ You are right, my Genevra ; it is only with your mother’s sanction that I should claim the first touch of those pure lips—the first—will it not be, Genevra ?—they have ever received from any man.”

Jenny drew herself up with a dignity of which Carruthers, a few moments before, would have thought her incapable, and replied coldly—

“ Is such a question any proof of respect, Sir Brian ? ”

“ Forgive me,” he said quite abjectly ; “ I did not mean to suggest what should offend you. ‘ The girls of the period ’ grant such favours with a laugh to any young fellow who is bold enough to presume on a surprise.”

Jenny bent her clear eyes upon his face, with a look in which the dawn of womanly sensibility shone faintly through a childlike sensibility.

“ You mean *foreign* girls,” she said. “ Every English girl is taught to keep her lips sacred for the one man whom she will promise to love.”

“ As you have promised me !” ventured Carruthers.

“ I have not promised anything,” rejoined Jenny, rebelliously ; but she laughed as she passed through the door, which her lover had opened for her, and fled back to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XI.

A RAILWAY RIDE.

HAD Jenny's own departure from Stratford Place not been so imminent, she might have missed Brian's attentions more ; but for the two days that remained for her stay in town, Georgina, and Lady Carruthers herself, exerted themselves more than they had previously done to interest and amuse her. True, the subjects in which they endeavoured to enlist her sympathies were chiefly their approaching visit to Paris, and the brilliant toilettes *à demi deuil* which Georgina was to take with her to Aix-les-Bains. But Genevra liked to admire pretty dresses as well as other girls, although she did not

covet them for her own personal adornment, and she was in the highest spirits at the prospect of returning to her tender mother and her rural pursuits. She thought a great deal oftener, at this time, of her pony, her kittens, and her doves, than she did of the newer acquisition of a lover. She was not reminded of him by any allusions from her aunt or her cousin, who had mutually agreed that the affair should be considered as not settled.

“Very likely it never will be,” Lady Carruthers said hopefully. “Brian cannot have made up his mind so soon.”

“Nor Genevra either,” said Georgina, laughing. “They both seem quite willing to wait.”

One reason for Genevra’s anxiety to go home was the feeling that Mrs. Farquhar would be able to clear up and settle the many floating plans which perplexed her

when she thought of Sir Brian's menace as to that postponed embrace. Had she really given him the "claim" which he asserted? Some vague theory of the nature and significance of the kiss masculine is sure to present itself, "somewhere, somehow, or somewhen," to every maiden's thought. Genevra was extremely undemonstrative in her affections, and lavished no caresses, except on her stepmother. Mrs. Burnes allowed, but never returned them, and not the liveliest imagination could associate the idea of kisses proper, kisses special, with a cold dab on an irresponsive cheek!

When Jenny was a very little girl "Uncle Charley" would take her on his knee and kiss her, but his wife very early checked the practice.

"There should be," she said, "no pseudo-relationships allowed between young girls and men. You are not really Genevra's

uncle, my dear Charles, nor will she be always a baby. Do not form a habit which in a few years would be indecorous. A young girl's lips should be kept sacred to the man she promises to marry."

Words which are not understood when spoken, often impress themselves on the memory of a thoughtful child, as did these on Jenny's, until she could, and did, repeat them almost verbatim in later years, and until, to her mind, a kiss grew to be something solemn, even sacramental, in its mysterious significance. But then, you see, Miss Farquhar was an odd girl.

When the day arrived for her journey homeward, there was a mischance. Maxwell, Georgina's maid, who was to have accompanied her, had been seized with a dreadful neuralgia in the night (invented for the occasion, as she had no desire for a tiresome railway journey into the country). "Her face

was so swelled"—it was certainly bandaged—"it was as much as her life was worth to go out in an east wind." And there were Jenny's boxes packed and corded. What was to be done? Lady Carruthers made a faint suggestion that she should wait a day or two; but Jenny would not hear of it—Mrs. Farquhar would be so bitterly disappointed. So the matter was settled by compromise. The footman was sent forward to arrange about the luggage, etc., and Lady Carruthers and her daughter themselves accompanied the young lady to the station, gave her in charge of the guard, and saw her securely fastened into a "ladies'" carriage, with all her travelling comforts around her, and then, with a profusion of affectionate farewells, stood waving their hands to her on the platform, as the train steamed away; the aunt's last *audible* words being, "We shall miss you so, dear child," and the cousin's—

when beyond hearing—"Now we have done our duty by Brian's little rustic, and may bless Providence that it is over?"

And Genevra could have echoed the thanksgiving. The temporary excitement of her visit had passed off, and now, in the subsequent reaction, all seemed dreamlike and shadowy, Sir Brian and his wooing most of all. She would be at home once more! At home, with all who really loved her —her mother, and Uncle Charley, and—yes, even sister Chatty loved her, she believed, after a fashion. At home, with the free range of hill and meadow; with her birds, and her dogs, and her pony; and all the household, and all the parish, to pet her, and praise her, and scold her, even! She descended from her momentary elevation on "the white heights of womanhood," and forgot all about Sir Brian and his claims. She turned from that brief episode of

courtship, as she would have thrown aside a poem or a romance, to go forth to listen to the thrushes, or to pluck the first chestnut blooms. She would take up the book again by-and-by, where she had turned down the page !

She looked after Lady Carruthers and her daughter, as they disappeared from the platform, and then drew back her head and glanced at her fellow-travellers in the compartment — a wan, yellow lady, closely veiled and respiratored, and a maid, or companion, bouncing and bonnie, who every now and then stooped forward, and shouted some trivial remark to her mistress in a voice that might have startled the stoker. Jenny's first emotion was pity for her companion, but before the train stopped at the first station, it became pity for herself, and, being a young lady prompt and energetic in action, she was ready for the

guard the moment he showed his face, and demanded a change of carriage. Probably it was no new experience to that functionary, that a pretty girl, imprisoned by her friends in a "ladies'" carriage, should desire more general society ; for he made no objection, but led her to an empty carriage, beside the open door of which two young men were engaged in earnest conversation. He glanced doubtfully at them, and, apparently deciding that neither of them could be labelled "dangerous," he handed the girl in, placed her packages beside her, and departed ; while Jenny, who had rarely known bashfulness, and would never know how to feign it, leaned a little forward in her seat, and watched the youths, scarcely more than boys, with a meditative doubt whether both or only one was to be her fellow-traveller ; and if but one, which would she prefer ? One was

a lad of about twenty, short, clumsily built, with a suspicion of bow legs, a face strongly freckled, and a shock head of hair of the vivid scarlet-orange hue of a healthy carrot. His eyes were small and pale, his mouth was of Gargantuan dimensions, though ornamented with a good set of teeth, and, except this feature, there was nothing to be placed to the account of his attractions but a frank, kindly expression of merry good humour and “ready-to-obligingness.” His companion was a youth some two years older, considerably above the middle height. It would have been puzzling to guess his nationality, for, with the stature and powerful build that might belong to an Englishman, a Russian, a Dane, there was a refined intelligence in his delicate features, in his large, dreamy, dark eyes, and the tint of his complexion, that might have spoken of Spanish or even Indian extraction—in fact,

it was both. As he stood there, listening with a smile to his friend's eager chatter, a group of young men passed him, glancing as they went by at his lofty height, the width of shoulder and depth of chest that told of physical strength, with the grace that sometimes goes with perfect proportion ; and one said to the other, "Moray of Balliol. Handsome fellow, isn't he ?" while two girls in the next carriage gazed from the window (like Jenny) at the dark expressive face, the silky raven-black hair and moustache, and the brilliant white teeth that glittered beneath it, and said to one another, quite audibly, "Isn't he perfectly lovely ?"

But before Jenny had quite made her choice, the guard's whistle sounded and the taller of the lads sprang into the carriage.

"Well, good-bye, old man," sang out his friend. "Wire to me if Fair Fury looks like winning ; and oh, I say, Sir Galliard——"

But the saying, whatever it was, did not overtake the departing train, and Jenny, remembering Lady Carruthers' awful warning against conversation with strangers in railway carriages, folded her pretty lips into an expression of absolute reserve, and taking up a *Pall Mall*, with which her cousin had gifted her at parting, arranged it skilfully so that she could gaze on her *vis-à-vis* behind it without much danger of detection. After all, her aunt must have been right in calling her "such a baby," or could she have diverted herself with observations of an entire stranger, instead of pondering on the all-important fact that she had but a few hours before received her "first offer," and more, that she had almost, if not finally, accepted it ?

Unused as Miss Farquhar had been to the society of young people, and especially of young men, it was not marvellous that she

should find this specimen of the genus a very favourable one. Not only was he good looking, but he was well dressed, and with a distinguished air, that bespoke him well-born and well-bred. It was a thoughtful, refined, sensitive face, and as it bent over nothing more interesting than the obstinate straps of a leather knapsack that he was vainly trying to unfasten, the long black lashes that curled on his cheek reminded Jenny (with an alteration) of the Prince's apostrophe to the Sleeping Beauty (girls' thoughts are such foolish things !)—

“Love, if thy tresses be so dark,
How dark those hidden eyes must be !”

He lifted them suddenly, and she saw that they were indeed night-black, large and calm, but with something of sadness in them, and something, too, of suppressed fire in their depths. The silence was broken by a very prosaic inquiry.

“Would you like to have this window put up?”

The words were common enough, but the voice that spoke them would have made the cry “Fresh herrin’!” musical. A voice deep, rich, and soft as the first low trill of the nightingale, with its suggestion of infinite melody, that will presently entrance the night. So entranced was Jenny, that she was silent for an instant, as if waiting for a fuller music; then recollecting herself, she blushed a little, and replied confusedly—

“I beg your pardon—yes, please. I was thinking——” A month ago she would have said unconcernedly, “What a magnificent voice you have!” but a few weeks’ sojourn among her more polished relatives had taught her something of conventional reserve, and she checked herself, resuming, “I was thinking of something!”

The youth put up the window as desired,

and returned to his contest with the straps, his unspoken reflection being, “What an awful fool she is! and she does not look like one either!”

As for Genevra, she was overwhelmed with humiliation and self-disgust. “What an imbecile thing to say! What an idiot he must think me!” (You see, she was right there.) “If he would only speak again!”

But he remained silent, probably as anticipating no conversational enjoyment, until Jenny, forgetting her aunt’s warning, ventured to take the initiative.

“Please, *Sir Galliard*, I should like the other window closed; the dust blows in on that side.”

The young man looked up once more, but with such evident amazement and perplexity, that Jenny was at her ease directly, and laughed gaily.

“You are surprised that I should know

your name? I heard your friend on the platform call you 'Sir Galliard.' ”

“ Oh”—with a grave smile—“ that is only a nickname. Most of our men call me 'Sir Galahad.' ”

“ Then,” rejoined Jenny, “ he is as inarticulate as a railway porter. He certainly pronounced it 'Galliard.' But who are your 'men' ? ”

“ My friends—the men of Balliol.”

“ Are you an undergraduate ? ”

“ Not now. I have taken my degree.”

“ Sister Chatty says,” observed Jenny, sententiously, “ that undergraduates are only big schoolboys who play at being men. Why did they call you Sir Galahad ? ”

“ They fancied they saw a likeness, I suppose. Our men——”

“ Boys,” corrected Jenny emphatically.

“ Had a whim of calling each other after King Arthur's knights, and they chose me——”

“They were foolish boys——”

“Men,” corrected the youth, in his turn.

“Because you are not a bit like Sir Galahad, who was fair.”

“Mislike me not for my complexion, the shadowed livery of the burnished sun,” murmured the young man; and Jenny’s eyes sparkled. “At least, the men——”

“Boys.”

“Men,” repeated her companion, still gravely.

And then both burst into merry laughter—laughter which transformed the seriousness of Sir Galahad’s features into youthful fun and playfulness, and brought out Jenny’s sweetest dimples and showed her pearly teeth. After that the barrier of etiquette quite broke down between the girl and boy, and Genevra prattled away, quite regardless of Lady Carruthers’ warning, asking all sorts of indiscreet questions,

making all sorts of indiscreet confidences ; both happy, both interested in each other, fresh and free in the innocent egoism of early youth. But Jenny did not name Sir Brian, partly from instinctive reserve, but more because that subject had not, for the moment, any interest for her ; and her new friend was far more intent on eliciting her habits and tastes than on avowing his own. But soon this fact dawned upon Genevra, and checked a little the tide of her garrulity, or at least diverted it into another channel.

“ Now,” she said, “ you know all about me—”

“ Except your name.”

“ So tell me your history.”

“ I will, when it is finished, if you will ask me then. I am only at the titlepage as yet.”

“ Tell me the titlepage, then.”

“ You had read that when you called me ‘ *Sir Galliard*.’ ”

“ You are laughing at me,” pouted Jenny, “ but it was your friend’s fault. People ought not to use nicknames on a railway platform”—with a little air of dignity, which vastly amused the youth, in a lady so openly defiant of railway proprieties. “ What is your real name ? ”

“ I am Kit Moray, at your service,” he answered, with a little bow.

“ Kit ? That stands for Christopher, does it not ? ”

“ My godfathers and godmother,” he answered, “ stood for Keith.”

“ Your real name is very hard to get at. But *why* did your friends think you like Sir Galahad ? ”

And then, as if wrought upon by the spell of a magician, the lines dropped slowly from the young man’s lips—

“ ‘ I never felt the kiss of love,
Or maiden’s hand in mine.’ ”

“ Did you not, really ? ” asked Jenny, looking with perfect simplicity into Moray’s face.

“ No, really. Why should I ? ” he answered, returning her gaze more fixedly than he had yet done.

“ Oh, I don’t know,” she said carelessly. “ Of course ladies never kiss any one except their brothers, but somehow I thought men did not mind.”

“ I do not think they do,” replied Keith, drily, and still keeping his eyes fixed on her face. But in the innocent look that met his, there was such a transparent unconsciousness of imprudence, that, being a gentleman to the tips of his fingers, he felt it would be taking a mean advantage to encourage her to pursue the subject. But Jenny dropped it of her own accord.

“I don’t know much about undergraduates,” she said loftily, as if undergraduates were quite beneath her attention ; “I have no brothers, and know almost no boys. Were you ever picked ?” and, seeing Keith’s look of bewilderment, “I ought not to ask you that. I congratulated Mrs. Luttrell once on her nephew being picked. Picked soldiers, you know, are always distinguished men, and I thought it was the same with University—boys. And, poor thing, she burst into tears. She had been so proud of her nephew, and boasted so of him !”

“I suppose,” said Keith, “that you mean he was ‘plucked’ ?”

“Plucked ! Oh yes, of course ; I remember now. Uncle Charley laughed at me, and corrected me, but I forgot it again. Well then, have you been plucked ?”

“Certainly not !” returned the youth.

Fancy asking “Moray of Balliol” if he had been plucked! He had, in fact, read for honours, and had achieved brilliant success. His little catechizer resumed—

“What are you going to be? A doctor—a barrister—a——”

“Guess,” answered Keith, smiling; “what do I look like?”

And Jenny put her head on one side, with a pretty, pet-birdlike gesture she sometimes used, and after contemplating him gravely for a moment, replied—

“I cannot guess. What are you?”

“Not much as yet,” said the young man. “I live with a bachelor uncle, who is in ill health, and I make myself useful to him. But soon—when he can spare me—I shall join a scientific expedition into far-distant lands—China, or Africa—for the advancement of science and civilization.”

“A traveller?” inquired Genevra, much

interested. “ My father was a distinguished traveller and naturalist ; he died, away from us, from his home, in the deserts of the Caucasus.” She stopped suddenly, and over her face came the soft shadow which was its sweetest and rarest charm. But she was not then thinking of her father. Her thoughts were not in the Caucasus, but in the Zoo, where an elderly gentleman had smiled kindly at her, and suggested a joint excursion to see humming-birds in their native lands ! How strange that almost the next man she met should be, or be going to be, a real traveller, like her father. Sir Brian, after all, was no man of science ; only a dilettante, at the best.

Keith naturally thought that her abrupt silence and sadness of countenance was caused by filial regret, and hastened to change the subject, but could find nothing better to say ou the spur of the moment

than—"Have you had a gay season in town?"

"Gay?" echoed Jenny. "Anything but gay. My aunt and cousin are in deep mourning, and could not take me anywhere. I should have liked to go to a dance or two."

"And I," thought Keith, "would like to be your partner at one." He little foresaw what he would have to go through before reaching that desired consummation!

"I have never," continued Jenny, "been at any but Christmas and children's balls, until last autumn, when I coaxed mamma to take me to the Hunt Ball. Dear old Dr. Stewart escorted us. Mr. Wyndham, the Master of the Hounds, is my godfather, and sent me a card, but sister Chatty told mamma she must never take me again, because I danced with scarcely any one but the farmers' sons."

"How was that?"

“Why,” said Jenny, laughing, “I believe I was not a success. For one thing, I was badly dressed. My dress was made in the village, and it certainly *did* look dowdy among all the brilliant toilettes there.”

“But,” said Keith, a little surprised to find himself drawn into a discussion on such a subject, “you are very well dressed now.”

And so she was. Her plain tailor-made serge fitted beautifully on her slender but ripely rounded form ; the accessories, from the simple collar and tie to the neatly buttoned gloves and the tiny boots, were perfect ; and the hat, perched on her rich braids of glistening hair, had certainly not been bought at Wendholm. The young man’s eyes, as they dwelt upon her, took in all these satisfactory details, and Jenny gave him a little saucy nod.

“I ought to be well dressed,” said she. “Georgie took me to Madame—I forget

her name—her own milliner in town, and made me promise that I would always, henceforth, wear only what she made for me, and sent to me and gave her directions accordingly. Only fancy ! won't the jays in the Oakland woods applaud me ! ” and she broke into a silvery chime of laughter, so full of merry self-mockery, blended with playful girlish exultation, that Keith thought it the sweetest music he had ever heard. “ I can tell you the dressmaker's name,” she continued ; “ I have got her card with me somewhere.”

Keith impulsively caught the little hand as it was straying to her bag in search of the card, but dropped it instantly, as if it had been red-hot.

“ Never mind the card,” he smiled. “ I am in no pressing need of a milliner's address. But I think I have some right to ask your name, as I have given you mine. May I ? ”

“I am Genevra,” answered the girl, simply.

“Genevra? that is a lovely name, but Genevra what? You are Miss—Miss——”

But before Jenny could reply, the train slackened speed, and the head of a ticket-porter loomed over the window-sill. “Tickets, please.” He took Keith’s half return ticket without remark, but, after glancing at Jenny’s, gave it back to her. “Too late to catch the Oulton train, miss; an hour and twenty minutes to wait for the next;” and he vanished.

“What am I to do?” cried the belated one.

“Will no one meet you,” inquired Keith, “or have you no friends in town you can go to, to wait?”

Jenny carefully put back her ticket in her purse, and her purse in her pocket, before she answered, “I do not know a human being

in the town. The guard promised my aunt to see me safe across the platform into the Oulton carriage, and said I should not have five minutes to wait. What *shall* I do ? Mamma will send to Oulton to meet the 2.20 train ; it is five miles farther than the Retford station, but there are more convenient trains there."

" Shall I wire for you ? " asked Keith.

" Oh no," laughed Jenny. " A telegram would frighten her to death ; but she will send to meet the next train."

Here the guard looked in, and Keith addressed him.

" I will take care of the lady," he said ; " do you look after her luggage. Her train goes——"

" An hour and twenty minutes to wait, sir. The luggage is labelled through to Oulton ; it will be all right."

" But what a horrible crowd there is

here!" remarked Jenny, as the youth handed her out of the carriage.

"It is the first day of the Races," he answered.

"Oh, and you told me you were coming to the Races, and I shall be left all alone!"

"I don't care for the Races. I shall be in time to see all I want of them. I will take care of you, and see you safe into your train first. Let me take you into the waiting-room."

And, indeed, that was but common humanity, for a down train had just discharged upon the platform a mob of roughs of all sorts and sexes; and, as Keith guided his little companion through them, he felt her shrink and cling closely to his arm.

"Now," he said, as he placed her in safety in the waiting-room, "I'll go and find out all about this Oulton train, and come back and tell you."

And Jenny was left alone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEXT STAGE.

WHEN Keith suggested remaining with Genevra until her train started, he was not sure that he was not taking an ungenerous advantage of the girl's inexperience, in proposing a step which a more worldly-wise woman might have declined to take ; but he forgot his scruples when, on returning to the waiting-room, he found her seated in a corner, with her eyes anxiously fixed on the door, and near her a throng of gaily attired "ladies," among whom she looked like a *real* violet in a bouquet of muslin daffodils. She sprang forward eagerly when she descried her fellow-traveller.

“ You have an hour to wait yet,” said he ; “ shall I order some refreshment for you here ? ”

“ I don’t want any refreshment ; I have eaten some biscuits my aunt gave me. I want to go out of this odious station. We have a whole hour, you say ? ”

A whole hour to spend together ! How was it to be passed ? At an hotel ? But Keith’s instincts of propriety revolted against such a breach of decorum.

“ Let us go and see the Races ! ” cried the irrepressible damsel.

But Keith shook his head, and felt it was clearly his “ mission ” to take charge of the “ wild maid of the woods,” who was as incapable of guarding herself against worldly perils as a gannet or a penguin on a island rock. But he did not now say to himself that she was an “ awful fool.” Suddenly a bright idea occurred

to him. “ Shall we go and see the cathedral ? ”

Genevra had no profound interest in cathedrals, having no strong ecclesiastical or architectural proclivities, but she did not object ; and the hour passed very pleasantly, while Keith, who could be very eloquent on occasion, discoursed in his deep, melodious voice, like another Coleridge, on art and architecture, rood and reredos, spires, altars, and tombs. And Jenny listened with such rapt attention—rather, it is to be feared, to the music of the voice than the topics discussed by it—that the orator, like most orators, was charmed by the genius that spoke in her silence, and would not have inferred in her the possibility of ignorance, though she had mistaken a cherub for a gargoyle !

But more than an hour had expired when they regained the station. Keith darted to

the ticket office, darted back again, and hurried Genevra into the already steaming train.

“ We part here ? ” she said regretfully.

But he sprang into the carriage, and took a seat opposite to her. “ I mean to see you safe in your friends’ charge,” he said ; and Jenny felt so grateful to him !

This time the two were not alone together. There was an elderly gentleman in the carriage ; and as Jenny glanced at him as she entered, she was reminded of Sir Brian, although, in point of fact, there was no point of resemblance between them, except a grey moustache, and she was scarcely conscious of wondering whether Sir Brian was really so old as *that*.

The young pair speedily resumed their conversation, which had wandered from the domain of art to that of literature, and of course, since it was no longer a *tête-à-tête*, it was natural that Keith should make it so,

by lowering his voice a little, and bending forward, nearer and nearer, to catch her more subdued replies. So that the elder man glanced at them with the half-pitying, half-amused sympathy which ancients give to youthful lovers, and then returned to his paper and forgot them. The train was a slow one, but they had passed several stations before the shout of the porter proclaimed "Oulton," and, obeying a signal from Keith, he threw open the door. The young man sprang out, and offered his hand to assist Genevra, who was looking round her in perplexity.

"Did he say——" she began.

"All right, miss. Look sharp; all trains behind time."

And before she knew what she was doing, she had mechanically obeyed the impulse of Keith's hand, and found herself lifted to the platform and drawn

hastily aside from the departing train, which steamed away, leaving the youth and the maid alone on the platform, with one porter lounging by an empty truck, and another waiting for the tickets beside a wicket gate.

“There is some mistake,” said Genevra, looking wistfully round her, “and I don’t see my luggage.”

“It will be all right; it was labelled for Oulton.”

“But——”

The ticket porter, tired of waiting, had now drawn near. He received Keith’s ticket without remark, but on looking at Jenny’s, returned it to her, saying briefly, “Wrong station, miss.”

She turned reproachfully on Moray. “It is your fault; you hurried me out. I was sure it was the wrong station. What shall I do?” she continued anxiously, for

the unmistakable consternation in the young man's face alarmed her, she knew not why.

"I thought you said Oulton," he answered. "You know I told you it was not much out of my way. I had meant to stop at Stretford."

Jenny paid no heed to his excuses. "How far is it to Woolton?" she asked the porter.

"Woolton? Oh, well, you are on the wrong line; you ought to have taken the train at Stretford for Lytham Junction."

"Stupid blockhead that I am!" cried Keith; "I ought to have looked at your ticket. Can you ever forgive me? I shall never forgive myself!"

His unfeigned distress seemed excessive to Jenny, who did not understand, as he did, the gravity of the situation, and she endeavoured to console him.

"Well, never mind; there is a later train

to Woolton, and they will be sure to meet every train till I come. We can go back to Stretford and catch that, I dare say."

But Keith gazed round him at the lonely third-class station, with its few thinly scattered houses, and his heart died within him ; while the porter confirmed his worst fears.

"There's no train from here to Stretford again to-day, miss. There's a goods train at 7.40 this evening, and—yes, there's a cattle train at eight, for Chingley Fair to-morrow."

"How far to the nearest station, where we might manage to get on the right line somehow?"

"Well, you could drive across country to Lytham Junction ; the train from Stretford could pick you up there."

Keith brightened. "How far to Lytham?"

“Ten miles or so. You could do it under the two hours, if you went through Buckholt Wood.”

“That will do!” cried Jenny, joyfully. “It is three o’clock now ; I should be at home before seven. There’s a fly to be had here, I suppose ?”

The porter stared helplessly at her.

“Bless your heart, there’s no call for flys here—no nearer than Colebrook, five mile or more.”

Even poor Genevra’s countenance fell at this cheerful announcement ; but Keith rose to the occasion.

“There must be a horse to be had. I will ride over and bring back a fly, and wire to Woolton for you.”

“There’s Joe Simmons of the Plough yonder,” suggested the porter, dreamily ; “he’s got a old horse and trap as could take you to Lytham. If it’s in the stable, he

might let you have it; but you'd have to drive yourself, for there's not a man about the place but himself, and he broke his arm the other day, falling from——”

But, without stopping to hear the tale of Joe Simmons's misfortune, Keith had bounded, like a greyhound from the leash, across the little meadow which divided the railway from the hamlet, and Jenny was left in charge of the railway official, who, expectant of a coming gratuity, hovered round her like a hen with a solitary chicken, until, in less time than might have been anticipated, though it seemed very long to her, Keith reappeared at the gates of the crossing on his triumphal car, the said car being a decrepit “shandrydan,” drawn by a chestnut pony that had long since attained to years of discretion, which Moray had been obliged to harness himself, leaving a deposit with the landlord of the Plough

which would have covered the full value of the whole equipage. Then, having received directions from the porter as to the way through Buckholt Wood to Lytham Junction, Keith handed the young lady into "the trap" (ominous name!), tipped the porter to his heart's content, and merrily the couple bowled away on this, the third stage of their interminable journey.

CHAPTER XIII.

OFF THE LINE.

INTERMINABLE indeed! If they had only known! But these inconsiderate young creatures neither knew nor cared.

“Alas! unmindful of their doom,
The little victims play!”

The temporary difficulty surmounted, all was forgotten. The May day was bright, the road was good, the chestnut pony stepped out gallantly, the fresh sweet air was very exhilarating after the dust and smoke of the engines and the close, stuffy carriages. Jenny ceased to yearn after her luggage, and readily accepted the hopeful view suggested by Keith, that it would

come right—it always did when the things were labelled ; and, besides, when they reached Lytham they could “wire” all necessary inquiries and directions.

Keith forgot all his habitual reserve in the charm of this rapid intimacy, and Genevra forgot—Sir Brian Carruthers !

“This is not half a bad horse, after all,” remarked Keith, “though he has seen his best days, poor old fellow ! It is just as well you have not got your luggage ; he could not step out so if he had much weight to carry.”

“Oh, my luggage would not have oppressed him much,” laughed Jenny. “I dare say you fancy that girls must always have such heaps of things on a journey ?”

“They always seem to have,” returned Keith ; “but I do not know many ladies—not young ones. My uncle is a bachelor, and has no ladies belonging to him.”

“And I,” rejoined Genevra, “never have known any young men, only old—no, middle-aged ones.” (Sir Brian would not have unduly exulted at the form in which his image at length rose to his little lady’s remembrance.) “But, Mr. Moray, are you quite sure that this is the road through the wood that the man directed you to ?”

“It must be, since there seems no other ;” and Keith quitted the high-road, to enter a beautiful miniature forest of beeches, now in their first delicate spring verdure.

“It is a rough road,” observed Genevra.

“It will be better by-and-by. They have been carrying timber, and it is rather cut up just here.”

“I wish they were forbidden to cut down trees *anywhere* ; then all woods would be as lovely as they are at Oaklands.”

“And what is Oaklands ?”

“It is the most delicious wood in the

world," cried Jenny, enthusiastically. "Very few people ever go through it, except the gamekeepers, and *I* won't let them kill the wild things."

Keith stared a little at this assertion, not having hitherto found gamekeepers so easily impressed by a young lady's humanitarian views.

"And so it is full of woodland creatures and——"

"Any game?" queried the youth.

"Yes, swarms of pheasants, and rabbits, and hedgehogs, and squirrels, and—oh, dear little weasels with white breasts."

"Quite a happy family," smiled Keith. "You must have immense influence over your gamekeepers." And looking down sideways at the flushed and eager face, he ceased to marvel at those gentlemen's docility.

"And," continued Miss Farquhar, "they are oak woods chiefly, so not like this.

I should think," reflectively, "there are not so many 'Purple Emperors' here."

"This," answered Keith, decisively, "is the most perfect scenery I ever saw in my life."

At which statement a crimson-headed woodpecker, that peeped at them behind the rugged boles of the beeches, burst into a shrill, derisive laugh.

"See," he continued, raising his eyes, which had before been fixed on his companion's face—"see the satin foliage with——"

But Jenny, not feeling at all sentimental, interrupted him. "Satin foliage belongs to artificial flowers."

"Still," replied Keith, "we are obliged, sometimes, in describing nature, to borrow the terms of art, however inadequate."

"But," insisted Jenny, "satin is not art—it is manufacture."

“Then, admire the *shining* foliage—will that do?—with the light trickling through it like emerald-tinted spray. You can almost fancy that the moss beneath is moistened by it.”

“No, I can’t,” answered Jenny; then, relenting a little, “But it is all very lovely; and those knotted stems, with the young growth springing from them, they look——”

“Like trees in knickerbockers,” said Keith, demurely; and then the blended laughter of the foolish pair rang out so clear and glad, that the woodpecker was fain to join in it.

“Look,” said Genevra, presently, “there is a much better road, and softer for the pony’s feet; that must be our way,” pointing to a broad avenue of velvet sward, beyond which stretched a far vista of twinkling verdure.

But Keith demurred. “That is only a

ride,' and would lead nowhere. The porter said 'straight through, and the road to the left.' ”

“That *is* to the left,” persisted Jenny. “I am sure he meant *that*.”

A brisk and merry dispute ensued. The youth stood firm for a time, but when his companion dropped the imperative mood, and “stooped to conquer” by entreaty, he yielded to her wish, and left the rugged road for the smoother path, merely observing—

“It will take us to the high-road, no doubt, but perhaps farther back than the other path would have led us. However, we have plenty of time.”

Alas! the promise of the emerald sward was as deceptive as the treacherous allure-
ment of a morass. It grew narrower and narrower, until there was no space to turn in. Almost it threatened to dwindle into a

bridle-path ! It wound gradually, almost imperceptibly, among the low, sweeping branches, until neither of the travellers could discern the “bearings” of the road they tried to reach. Keith’s brow once more wore a cloud of grave anxiety, and the dimples round Jenny’s mouth might have been stolen by the twinkling beeches. She was beginning to feel like a sleeper, wandering endlessly in a dream. Suddenly she uttered a cry of delight, as far and faint, but quite distinct, came the sound of a horse’s hoofs trotting along a hard high-road.

“I knew it would be all right,” she cried exultingly. “I knew——”

Not much more for the moment. The pony stumbled in the deep ruts. Down went horse and trap, and poor Jenny, having started up in her excitement, was pitched out, and lay senseless and

motionless on the thymy bank bordering the pathway, with her head in perilous proximity to the forefeet of the struggling horse. In a moment Keith had sprung to the pony, raised him carefully, and, having extricated him from the broken shafts, led him to a safe distance and tied him by the bridle to a tree. That danger averted, he returned to the still insensible girl, and stood gazing down upon her, as pale as herself. Then, stooping, he lifted her light form in his arms, and carried her tenderly to a soft bed of moss and heath, a few steps removed from the rough pathway. He looked round for help. Not a being was visible. He shouted; he listened. The woodpecker's startled laugh was the only answering cry.

CHAPTER XIV.

KEITH FORGETS HIMSELF.

JENNY's hat had fallen off, her hair had escaped from its braids, and the always rebellious curls, that now strayed over her shoulders, the long fringed eyelids, and parted lips from which the smile had scarcely faded, gave her the look of a sleeping child. As Keith stood looking down on her, his heart ached with an anguish of grief and pity, while tears, that did not disgrace his manhood, dropped fast and warm on the pale upturned face. But no colour came to the sweet face; no light to the closed eyes. Hardly knowing what he did, the young man bent over her. His

own tears were glittering on her cheek. He wiped them off, and tenderly, reverently, as he would have kissed a young dead sister, he touched her lips with his own, and—her lips trembled ! “*Ce n'est que le premier pas que coûte.*” In a sudden revulsion of feeling, from horror and despair to hope, he kissed her again.

In the confused dawn of consciousness, Genevra fancied herself in her own little bed once more, awakened by the gentle motherly caress which was never unreturned. Keith kissed her, *and she returned the kiss !*

The young fellow fairly lost his head ; he knelt down beside her, he folded her in his arms, breathing in a mingled rapture of caresses and entreaty that for his sake she would look up, and live, and love !

Slowly the blue eyes opened, and turned a doubting, wondering look on his eager face, and then—— Oh, Keith ! the gods

have mocked you in granting but half your prayer. Live she did, but love she didn't. There was nothing less like love than the angry flash of the blue eyes, as consciousness fully returned in them ; nothing less like love than the energy with which she struggled to break from the arms that encircled her ; and as Keith withdrew them, and rose to his feet, there was, not love, but utter indignation and disgust in the glance she shot at him, as he stood, humilitated, abashed, and self-condemned before her. Yet he had meant no harm. No youth was ever purer in life and thought and will than was Keith Moray. Pure as the maiden knight himself, not from coldness of temperament, but from the resolute self-restraint which is the truest crown of a noble manhood.

Yet now he cowered beneath the awful ferocity of Jenny Farquhar's gaze, feeling

that she thought him, and that he deserved that she should think him, an unmitigated blackguard, a creeping, crawling cad. There was a dead silence, broken only by the derisive laugh of the jaffingale, which this time had the joke to itself. Then Jenny turned away her head, and tried to rise, but fell back with a low moan, which, but for her new-born sense of dignity, would have been a piercing shriek of anguish. Keith sprang to her side, but was incontinently repulsed with ignominy.

“I do not wish for your help; go and put the trap to rights, and harness the horse again.”

Keith obeyed without a word, and Jenny followed his movements with glowering eyes, which met his with redoubled sternness when he looked sadly towards her and said, “The horse is all right, but the trap is useless; the shaft is broken.”

“And, pray, how do you propose to take me to Lytham ?”

“If I had a piece of string,” replied Keith, humbly, “I think I could mend it so as to get to Lytham, but——” feeling helplessly in his pockets.

“But,” snapped Jenny, “you haven’t got any, and how long am I to sit here while——” She broke off, with a stifled moan, and then resumed : “You were very stupid to upset the trap. You are the very worst driver I ever saw in my life !”

At any other time this cruel and most unmerited accusation would have driven Keith Moray to defend himself, but now he felt a gloomy pleasure in laying himself beneath her trampling feet. He answered meekly—

“The high-road cannot be far off ; I will run and get assistance. You will not mind being left alone for a few minutes ?”

“I shall very much prefer it”—with crushing emphasis.

And away flew Keith, leaving Jenny seated where he had placed her, with dim, unseeing eyes fixed on the broken trap and the quietly grazing pony. But the fictitious energy inspired by anger was fast ebbing away ; her thoughts grew confused, her head swam, and once more she fell back insensible. She was aroused by a frightful pang, and opened her eyes with a low cry. An elderly man, apparently a doctor, was examining her injured foot, from which, already inflamed and swollen, he had cut off the boot with a penknife. Keith stood by, looking on, with a world of sorrowful sympathy in his dark eyes. Jenny only wished he would leave her with the doctor, and not stand staring there.

“She will be all right,” said the old gentlemen, cheerily. “No bones broken ;

just a sprain. Want to get home? Certainly, my dear; you shall be safe in your bed by sundown. Lytham station? Yes, yes. On the way to Lytham myself, to meet a friend, when your husband stopped me. Don't try to speak," added the good man innocently, unobservant of the confusion with which he had overwhelmed the young couple. "You are a little faint, and your husband has told me everything." ("Scarcely," thought Keith.) He had turned aside to examine the broken trap, and now looked up. "It will be impossible to use this thing; the wheel, as well as the shaft, is splintered."

Poor little Jenny broke into a piteous wail. "I *must* go home! Please take me to the station, doctor; I won't go with *him*"—with a pretty gesture towards Keith.

"Lost confidence in his driving, eh?" laughed the doctor. "Well, I don't know how he got you into such a road as this—

would break any carriage. Now then, young fellow; you must carry your good lady to my trap, and I'll drive her to Lytham and start her safe homewards. I can't offer to take you, because I can't spare my groom. You will have to see after the damage here; there's an inn not far from where you hailed me, where you can get help. Now, be quick; we have no time to lose;" and away hurried the doctor, without even offering his assistance in conveying the sufferer to the road, which he saw that the stalwart youth before him was quite capable of doing by himself.

Genevra opened her lips to demur very strongly to the arrangement, but Keith clearly perceived that there was, as Dr. Goodwin had said, "no time to lose" in prudish hesitation; so, regardless of the damsel's hostile attitude, he took her up in his arms as easily as if she had been a tiger

kitten ("Swooping upon me," said Genevra to herself later, "like a kite upon a dove," though it was a great deal more like a dove swooping on a kite!), and bore her swiftly and tenderly to the doctor's trap, which awaited them on the road to Lytham, a very short distance from the woodland path in which the upset happened. She was placed on the seat, as comfortably as possible, the doctor supporting her and the groom taking the reins. Keith handed the doctor his card.

"Let me hear from you to-morrow," he said. "I was not taking the lady further than Lytham."

"What's this?" said the doctor. "No, no, my dear sir, my services are not professional; wayfarers must help each other." But on Keith pressing his fee on him, he yielded.

The youth turned a vainly appealing look

on the resolutely averted face, now white and drawn with pain, and stood bareheaded in the road until the trap vanished round the corner. He picked up his card, which in the slight contest with the doctor had dropped in the road. Then he proceeded to the inn, to give directions about the pony and the broken cart, and, having hired another conveyance, followed the doctor and his charge to Lytham.

“She may miss the train,” he said inwardly, “and I can get back to town to-night *via* Lytham to Stretford.”

But the first hope, if it was a hope, was dissipated by the doctor’s reappearance shortly before he reached the junction. Keith sprang from his trap, and stood waiting for him on the road.

“Make yourself quite easy, my good fellow,” said the old gentleman, kindly; “I had time enough to bandage her foot

properly in the station room, and put her into a ladies' carriage, in charge of a motherly looking woman who was going the same way. She will be met at her journey's end, you say?"

"Yes, yes," answered Keith. "But did she tell you——"

"Poor child, she could tell me nothing—I could not allow her to speak—but she had her ticket all right from——" Here his horse showed signs of impatience; and, repeating "All right," the "good Samaritan" was whirled away, and Keith resumed his journey, his last inward utterance being, "She said I was the worst driver she ever saw; I know she never saw a better, and——Oh, by Jove! she never told me her name!"

CHAPTER XV.

A FIRST RESULT.

MRS. FARQUHAR herself met Genevra at Woolton, having been alarmed and anxious at her non-arrival by the earlier train. It was a six miles' drive to the Grange, so that it was dark before she was undressed and laid in her own little bed, with racking pains in her injured foot, and the sound of a whole factory full of engines whirring and pulsing through her aching head. To her mother's anxious questions she had given a simple answer—the truth, but not the whole truth. “She had taken the wrong train at Stretford, and had been obliged to hire a dog-cart to drive across country to Lytham.

The driver had upset her, and she had sprained her foot," and so on. The explanation was perfectly satisfactory to her friends, "the driver" suggesting merely the inn-servant, or cabman, and before morning the increasing fever and inflammation alarmed both Mrs. Farquhar and her sister too much to leave any room for curiosity as to minor details. Dr. Stewart was sent for with special urgency, and, fearing that there might have been some slight concussion of the brain, ordered the utmost quiet and silence to be maintained in the patient's room, from which even Mrs. Burnes was excluded.

"That woman Carruthers," she said, "ought to be ashamed of herself, sending a young girl alone on a long railway journey, without even a maid to take care of her! If the worst happens, it must be laid at her door."

“But, my dear,” suggested Charley, “a maid could not have prevented the accident with the trap.”

“A maid would have seen that there was no mistake about the train, when there would have been no occasion for the drive at all.”

“True, my love. You are always right.”

“And if the worst happens, I shall never cease to reproach Juliet for not having attended to my advice to send Dinah to bring Genevra home.”

“A cheerful look-out for Juliet,” thought Mr. Burnes ; but he only said, “Let us hope, my dear, that this is the worst that will happen. It is bad enough, I am sure.”

“So it is,” assented the lady ; “but I do not believe that her head is injured a bit. Dr. Stewart is such a croaker ; he delights in frightening people, but he cannot frighten *me* ?”

“Brain ? Stuff ! Girls’ brains are too fluid

to be injured by a tumble! Nothing but fright. Doctors do make such a fuss about trifles. *I* could bring her round in a day or two, with just a cold-water compress and a dose of salts."

Once more, as Charley triumphantly affirmed, Mrs. Burnes proved herself to be "always right." In a few days the feverish symptoms had passed off, the local inflammation had subsided, and, though it might be two or three weeks before the patient would be able to move from her chamber, there was no longer any danger to be apprehended. Still, there was great weakness and languor, and Dr. Stewart, who had known the girl from her infancy, was a little puzzled to account for it. So comparatively slight an injury, in a constitution so thoroughly healthy as Genevra's, ought not so to have quenched her natural vivacity, or kept her so long listlessly irresponsible to all

her mother's loving efforts to amuse her, as she lay for hours on her couch, or with her eyes riveted on some book whose pages she never turned.

But at last the mystery was explained, or Jenny's people imagined that it was. Lady Carruthers had been written to, immediately on her niece's return. Mrs. Burnes had volunteered to announce it to her, but with such severity of blame for the neglect which had indirectly caused the misfortune, that it was not surprising that her letter was not acknowledged. Ten days later, came a letter to Mrs. Farquhar from Sir Brian Carruthers, written in evident ignorance of the intelligence that had been communicated to his aunt-in-law, as he expressed some surprise at not having received from Miss Farquhar the permission she had promised to send him to address her mother, on her arrival, and requesting

leave to present himself at the Grange, and receive her assent to the proposals which he had done himself the honour, etc., etc., and which the young lady had done him the still greater honour of accepting, subject to Mrs. Farquhar's approval.

Happily for Mrs. Farquhar, both Mr. and Mrs. Burnes were with her when this most unexpected communication reached her, and the shock of surprise and bewilderment was softened by being shared. For even the self-possessed sister Chatty was startled by such a revelation, and read the letter twice over, before she handed it to her husband, and took up her parable thus :

“Commend me to the girls of the period ! So this is the meaning of Miss Jenny's languishing reverie, is it ? Has she never confided the precious secret to you, Juliet ?”

“No, indeed. She has never breathed a word of it to me.”

“Perhaps she was ashamed of herself. She well may be—a mere child! Neither you nor I, Juliet, ever dreamed of lovers at her age.”

“But, Chatty, do you infer from this gentleman’s note that Jenny has already accepted him?”

“Accepted him? Of course she has! Why, if you two were worldly wise, instead of looking so scared at little Jenny’s conquest, you would be dancing for joy at the prospect of such a match for her!”

Here Mr. Burnes, who had been shaking with suppressed laughter over the letter, now interposed.

“With an old gentleman who might be her grandfather!” said sister Chatty.

“That is her affair. The Dowager Lady Carruthers jilted him in her youth for his old uncle, and Jenny jilts nobody; while he has the same advantages that his uncle

had in those days—same title, same fortune, without the drawbacks for Jenny of a stepson as old as herself, and a young lover discarded."

"Lady Carruthers!" repeated Mrs. Burnes, with a sniff *in alto*. "I do not think that *her* marriage was so successful that we should care to make it a precedent for Jenny's."

"But," said Mrs. Farquhar, "what am I to do? How am I to answer this letter?"

"You had better consult your daughter," said Charley, still laughing.

"I dare not excite her in her present state by broaching such a subject. I would much rather wait until she speaks of it herself, which she is sure to do, as soon as she is equal to it."

"Perhaps," said Charley, "the old gentleman has mistaken her."

"At all events"—from Mrs. Burnes—"he

could not see her yet, as I suppose he will wish to do if he comes down. Write and tell him how ill she is, Juliet, and that you cannot see him at present. Possibly, when she gets better, she will give you her full confidence."

The resolution was adopted *nem. con.*, and Mrs. Farquhar sat down, and then and there penned a few courteous lines to the elderly wooer, informing him of Genevra's illness (which, in her confusion of mind and desire to be brief, she called "a railway accident"), which would confine her for some time to her room, and render unadvisable any discussion of a nature that could not fail to agitate and excite her. Consequently, her mother requested Sir Brian to defer until her recovery the visit with which he proposed to honour her.

"Will that do, Chatty?" she asked, handing her letter to her sister.

“ Well, yes,” answered Mrs. Burnes, rather doubtfully, “ that is, if you mean to allow him to come here at all.”

“ How can I refuse ? He says Jenny has accepted him. I have no authority over her in such a matter.”

“ More’s the pity. But this is only a draft of your reply ; there is more than one correction in it ? ”

“ I will copy it fair, presently, if you can suggest no alteration ? ”

Mrs. Burnes suggested none ; and when she and her husband had quitted the Grange, Mrs. Farquhar took up both letters, put them into her pocket, and proceeded to her daughter’s room, where, to her dismay, she was greeted by the direct question—

“ Whom have you had a letter from, mamma ? ”

“ No letter for you, my darling,” answered Mrs. Farquhar, evasively, but reddening so

guiltily that Genevra was aware at once of some concealment—the more suspicious, it may be, from the consciousness of her own reserve.

“Are you hiding some secret from me, mother?” she said rather irritably. “I shall worry myself more by trying to guess it than you could harm me by telling it.”

A less cogent argument than this would have prevailed to win Mrs. Farquhar to break silence. She was only too glad to do so; and, bending tenderly over her darling, she said softly, “Have you withheld no secret from me, my child?”

Genevra turned on her with all her old vivacity. “He has written to you?” she cried eagerly. “How *dared* he?”

Mrs. Farquhar smiled, and answered a little mischievously, “Perhaps, Jenny, lovers are not so timid as you fancy they ought

to be — when they have had Sir Brian's experience."

"*Sir Brian!*" repeated Jenny, and fell back upon her pillows as if she had been flung there.

Mrs. Farquhar stood still in a dismayed silence. She was chilled, she knew not why, at the strange tone in which the girl had repeated the name "Sir Brian." It was almost as if she had expected some other suitor; but, of course, that was impossible!

Genevra was the first to speak. "You have had a letter from Sir Brian? Tell me all about it."

And her mother, as usual, obeyed her little autocrat's commands not only by reading to her the lover's letter and her reply, but adding all the commentary which it had evoked from herself and from both the Burnes. It was not until she had

exhausted all she had to say or to ask, and obviously "paused for a reply," that Jenny said—

"Forgive me, mother. I always meant to tell you about Sir Brian, but I thought there was time enough. I did not care to talk about—such things yet."

"Of course, my love, I understand. We will not talk about them until you are stronger. I did not mean to say a word, only you pressed me so."

"Mamma, I wish you to enclose a note from me in that letter of yours."

"Are you strong enough to write, dear? Shall I not give a message for you instead?"

"No"—very peremptorily.

Mrs. Farquhar stooped down, and, caressingly smoothing the invalid's hair, whispered, "Do you love Sir Brian Carruthers, Jenny?"

“Love him?” was the astounding reply.
“I hate him!” and down she sank again.

Poor Mrs. Farquhar was utterly bewildered. “Then he had *not* your permission to address me?”

“I don’t know,” answered the fickle fair one, pettishly. “Well, yes; I did tell him he might come.” She added, “I was wrong to say I hate Sir Brian. I like him very much; but I *cannot* marry him.”

“My love, we do not wish you to marry him. You are too young to think of marriage, and this gentleman is too old for you.”

“*Miles* too old!” insisted Jenny emphatically. In fact, through some unexplained mental process, the figure of the hapless baronet appeared to her imagination as if relegated to the dust of remotest antiquity; but she never asked herself how a few days could have effected such a change in her

estimate of age. "Still," she continued, "he is very nice and kind, and a perfect gentleman, and"—with a sudden fierceness—"he never kissed me!"

Mrs. Farquhar stared at the speaker in renewed perplexity, and then said, "I think I can understand, my darling. You had been excited by new scenes and new society, and could not realize what Sir Brian asked of you, nor what you promised him; but, this being so, had I not better explain it to Sir Brian, and decline his visit in your name, and altogether?"

"No," said Genevra; "I will write to him myself. Come to me in half an hour, and you shall have my note to put inside yours, but you must not read it."

"Very well," sighed the indulgent mother, and left the damsel to write her note alone. She returned to find that, with some effort, she had accomplished her task, and was

looking pale and weary, but more satisfied than she had hitherto seemed to be.

“Now, mamma,” she said, “please do not talk any more about my visit to Aunt Carruthers. It was all very tiresome, and I *am* so glad to be at home with you again.”

CHAPTER XVI.

JILTED AGAIN.

SIR BRIAN had returned to town, and was seated alone, as it chanced, in the smoking-room of his club, enjoying the flavour of a choice cigar, and not particularly enjoying the meditations that floated through his brain, or the anxieties which he could not expel with the smoke. The truth is, however reluctantly the very youthful of either sex may receive it, that, at the first blush, even an accepted proposal of marriage is, to a middle-aged lover, not *all* unqualified rapture or even all-engrossing. He had been so occupied with business matters

while visiting his new inheritance, that he had awaited without impatience the promised permission to address Mrs. Farquhar. The late baronet had, as has been mentioned before, let Brackensfell for two years to a millowner whose own house the builders (not contractors) had promised should be completed within that period. But (not an unusual occurrence) they found themselves unable to fulfil this engagement, and Mr. Askew had requested an extension of his term of tenancy. Sir Brian had characteristically replied that he must take a week or two to consider it, feeling that his young bride and her mother should at least be consulted as to his plans for her future home. Hence his apparently lover-like precipitance in writing to Mrs. Farquhar, without waiting for Genevra's consent, as he had agreed to do. And now, as he mused on the decisive step he had taken,

his reflections would in words have been thus expressed—

“ Well, I am in for it now, and no mistake ! It is rather a leap in the dark ; but so marriage always is, more or less ; and it is a leap I was bound to take, sooner or later, and it is best not to wait until old age. I have escaped the snares of prospective mothers-in-law, and she is a sweet little girl, as fresh and pure as a daisy, innocent of worldly wiles, and will live happily with me in a pleasant climate, where there are birds and flowers—and monkeys. Quite a country girl, says my quondam sweetheart and present aunt. You were no country girl, my lady, when you jilted me for a title. Girls ‘in society’ know the value of such things. I don’t believe my little Jenny knows the difference between a baronet and a knight or a justice of the peace ! Still, I wish I had gone

down to see her among her people before I committed myself. What the deuce made me in such a hurry?"

And poor Sir Brian felt much as a person does who, in descending the stairs, misses the last step, and comes to the floor with a jar. He had reached this point in his meditations, when a waiter entered, and presented him with a letter marked "Immediate." In taking Mrs. Farquhar's note from the envelope, he did not observe the tiny one from Genevra which nestled beneath it, and read with real concern that his little lady was suffering.

"Railway accident?" he repeated. "I saw no notice of any railway accident at the time in the paper. It could not have been serious, or it could not have been hushed up. Hullo! here's a note in the envelope from my little girl herself—I hope to say there is no cause for alarm."

He opened Genevra's note, and this is what he read :—

“Do not think me ungrateful, dear Sir Brian, for the honour you have done me. I am not ungrateful. I know I was never worthy of it, and—it *cannot* be. You must forget all about it, for indeed I am not what you would have me. I am not worthy.

“GENEVRA.”

Certainly Jenny could not be suspected of having formed this abrupt and incoherent note on the model of any “elegant epistle,” and Sir Brian read it over two or three times before he could gather its full import; but when he did, he dashed it down on the table beside him, and muttered vehemently between his teeth, “Jilted again, by Jove!”

Presently he took it up once more, and

applied himself to the renewed study of it. Small blame to him that he could make nothing of it ! “ Not worthy ! ” How was she less worthy than when she accepted his offer ten days ago ? If she had pleaded some objection on the part of her friends ; if she had even hinted at the existence of some previous attachment, which she had formerly denied ! But “ not worthy ” ! That phrase, from some girls to some men would have had but one significance, but Sir Brian only glanced once at it to reject it decisively. “ Not that,” he said ; “ the child is as pure as snow. She is ignorant, from sheer innocence, of the construction that might be placed on her foolish words, but she has evidently not written at the dictation of her mother. No mother would have suffered such a letter to be sent if she had read it. Now, what am I to do about it ? ”

A “swain of Arcady” (Midlands), on being asked how he would act if suddenly confronted by some agricultural dilemma (I forget what), replied, “I’d take it home and champ it” (*Anglice*, “chew,” think over it). Sir Brian was an intellectual ruminant, and “champed” everything, even his love-letters. So he took Jenny’s note, which was hardly a love-letter, home with him to his hotel, and “champed it.” The result was a few lines to Mrs. Farquhar, enclosing fewer still to Genevra. To the mother he merely expressed the conventional regrets for the young lady’s illness, with an entreaty to be informed of her progress to recovery. To Jenny he said that he was sure that her note was written under the temporary excitement of nervous irritability, and would be susceptible of a very easy explanation when she was well enough to receive him. Until then, he would not

so much as remember it, and afterwards they would both forget it together.

Mrs. Farquhar thought the lover's letter a little cold ; but then, what might Genevra not have said to him in hers ? After a little hesitation, the girl silently handed her his reply to her enigmatical note.

“ It seems, my dear,” said the mother, “ that, after all, he does not accept your dismissal. He thinks, perhaps, that you do not know your own mind ? ”

Genevra vouchsafed no rejoinder to this very probable suggestion ; but in a subsequent conversation between Mrs. Farquhar and her sister, Mrs. Burnes fully concurred in it. “ At least,” she said, “ the man is right to insist on clearing up the muddle, whatever it is, by a *vivâ voce* explanation. Genevra could not possibly have assigned any rational excuse for accepting him one week, and refusing him the next. But

did she show you her letter to him, Juliet?"

"She did not," answered the mother, reluctantly.

"Then, in fact," pursued Mrs. Burnes, "we are just proceeding in the dark. Perhaps she never accepted him at all. She may have been too confused to know exactly what answer she gave to what must have been a totally unexpected proposal, and Sir Brian misunderstood her altogether."

"It may have been so," assented Mrs. Farquhar, adding brightly, "and that would explain her reserve with me. She was too ill to enter on such a subject, when there was no immediate necessity for it. It is more difficult to believe that she intended me to hear of it first from this gentleman himself."

But sister Chatty always liked to study

both sides of a question. "Or," she resumed, "she may not have positively refused him in the letter she wrote. Perhaps there was some misunderstanding between them, which she wished cleared up."

"It was too early for misunderstanding," objected Mrs. Farquhar.

"Oh, I don't know. Something may have occurred to her, upon reflection, after they parted. By the way, Juliet, does Genevra know that, by her father's last wish, she is forbidden to marry till her eighteenth year?"

"I have never named such a condition to her, Charlotte. You know we both agreed that the subject of marriage need not even be alluded to until she had arrived at her eighteenth year. How could we ever dream of a lover presenting himself to her before that age? He never would," added the mother, piteously, "if I

had kept her at home, which is, after all, the only safe place for a young girl."

"But," said Charley, who was present at this conference, "I should like to know what Lady Carruthers and her daughter say about this business. Have you heard nothing from them, Juliet?"

"Not a syllable."

"Perhaps it is a secret from them also?"

"That can hardly be, when they only met in Lady Carruthers' house."

"I don't know," said Charley, laughing. "You see, this Sir Brian was a lover of the old lady's formerly. He might have felt a little delicacy—eh, my Rosebud?"

"Nonsense, Charles," said his wife sternly. "Whatever they were formerly, they are aunt and nephew now. Well, we know nothing about the affair, except that there seems a ridiculous mystery about

it. The sooner it is cleared up the better, or best of all, perhaps, cleared away."

"It would be a grand marriage for Jenny, though," persisted Charley.

"Jenny is in no need of a grand marriage with an old man," answered Mrs. Burnes. "She is not a destitute orphan, Charles; and, if she were, I hope she would not consider matrimony as merely a means of livelihood."

"Do you disapprove of it altogether, Chatty?" inquired Mrs. Farquhar, timidly. "You know that as regards her marriage, as everything else, I am expressly forbidden to thwart my Genevra's inclinations."

"If we could only ascertain what her inclinations are!" answered Mrs. Burnes; "but even Sir Brian himself seems rather at a loss there."

"Ought I to write to him again, as he begs me to do?" said Juliet.

“No, if I were you, I should leave him alone ; let him come or not, as he likes and when he likes, or not at all. We none of us want him here.”

“*I do*,” said Charley. “I should like to have a look at Jenny’s first sweetheart ; and besides, my dear Chatty, since Juliet has no authority to dismiss him, and Jenny does not deny that she has given him the permission to visit her—whether she wishes to withdraw it or not—Juliet is bound to treat him with courtesy. I should advise her to answer his letter, and just say that her illness is not so severe as to call for regular bulletins—if he hears no more, he must infer that she is progressing favourably ; and leave them to settle their differences between them, without interference.”

The Vicar’s counsels prevailed, and the “young people,” as he called them, were left to make their own arrangements. For

some little time there was no further advance on Sir Brian's part, while Genevra maintained a resolute reserve, and refused to believe that he would make any further advance at all. But the leisurely lover was merely waiting until she should be supposed to be sufficiently recovered to receive his visit; and as, after Mrs. Farquhar's first brief letter, he was left to determine this point by conjecture, the crisis did not appear imminent.

CHAPTER XVII.

HURSTLEIGH.

AND in the mean time, what has become of our young Romeo—if a Romeo can be imagined to an unresponsive Juliet? At least, Sir Brian's unconscious rival had forfeited his claim to be called a Sir Galahad! Keith Moray had returned to Hurstleigh—not his native place, but to which it was confidently believed that he would one day be heir. It would not, by itself, be a wealthy inheritance.

Hurstleigh was an estate of some fourteen hundred acres, most of which, with the exception of those immediately surrounding the house, were barren, treeless sheep-farms

on the bleak Sussex downs ; and even the plantations round the house, although carefully planted and tended, and sheltered in a sunny hollow from the wild sea-winds, repaid but scantily the pains lavished upon them in profitable herbage or timber. But the heights above it, and the openings around it, gave partial glimpses of the sea, and everywhere the chalk downs were lovely with the varying beauty of light and shadow for ever sweeping over them. Hurstleigh was no ancestral domain, though so dearly valued by its present owner, James Moray, whose father, Dunlop Moray, had been one of the senior partners in a wealthy City firm. Dunlop Moray had married a still wealthier City heiress, who died shortly after the birth of her son, on whom, by settlement, her whole fortune was to devolve on his father's death. The boy was his father's idol and pride ; but when only nine years old, riding

beside him on his little pony, the horse suddenly shied, and flung him against a kerb-stone, the result being an injury to the spine, which, without actually crippling him, would render him hopelessly an invalid for life.

During the first years of his marriage, Mr. Moray had purchased Hurstleigh, then only a large sheep-farm, and had rebuilt, enlarged, and embellished it for a country seat; and here, by the advice of his physicians, the boy was taken for the benefit of the pure sea-breezes, and here he had lived ever since. Mr. Dunlop Moray married again, and his wife followed her predecessor in a few years, leaving, like the first Mrs. Moray, only one child, a son. But the parallel ended there. Raymond Moray, the younger son, grew up a healthy, active youth, fond of all the pleasures of society, with no taste whatever for the seclusion in

which his brother entrenched himself, and with a decided indifference no less to his person than to his pursuits. They seldom met, and never corresponded. The father died when James was thirty-two and Raymond eleven years younger, and shortly afterwards the younger brother received a commission in a regiment ordered to India, and departed with scarcely a farewell to the sickly sufferer, who had frequently paid, out of his own fortune, the debts which Raymond's extravagance had accumulated, receiving hardly an acknowledgment in return. Not until six years after his departure did any communication from the brilliant officer reach the lonely recluse, and then it was a startling one! It came in the shape of a beautiful black-eyed boy of some five years old, who was sent down to Hurstleigh in charge of an Indian ayah, and the following letter of introduction :—

“DEAR JAMES,

“I was glad to hear from Symonds that when he left England, you were as well, or as ill, as usual, in that dreary old hermitage of yours ; but as I am sure you must be confoundedly dull, I send you a nephew to amuse you. I dare say he'll be a lively companion, though the little beggar hates the sight of me, and I return the compliment. Knowing that you were always strait-laced, I send him with a copy of madam's ‘marriage lines,’ from which you may infer that he is my lawful son, though it is more than I feel sure of myself, which may account for the rather ‘overstrained relations’ between us. The whole business was a blunder. When I first came out, a mere boy, as you know, I was fascinated by a very beautiful girl a few years younger than myself, and in an

inferior social position. She was, besides, of Indian descent, so that marriage should have been out of the question, and would have been, had I been a little older and wiser. As it was, I was enticed into a marriage, which I had just sense enough to insist upon keeping secret until I could take or send her to England, where her Indian blood would not have been a disgrace. A few months later this lad was born, and, my regiment being ordered up the country, I had to leave her and the brat for two years. Before I returned the jade had eloped with some French trading fellow, leaving the child *à mon adresse*, and I never had tale or tidings of her until a year afterwards, when I learnt that she and her companion—d—n them both!—had been drowned in the ship in which they had sailed for Bordeaux. She had taken care to leave her marriage certificate secure in the hands of one of her

friends before she bolted, so I could not disown my son ; but feeling no paternal stirrings of heart towards him—little black brute !—I took no notice of him beyond paying for his provender, until, when Symonds told me that you were still at Hurstleigh, and taking no steps to provide an heir of your own, it occurred to me that mine might be useful to you, and I forward him accordingly. If you won't have him, send him to an orphanage, or to the work-house, if you like ; anything but send him back to me. He shows too much of the nigger to do any good here, and is too like his dam to please me, though that should be saying that the whelp is good looking too. You may as well send back the ayah ; she was only hired for the job, and knows nothing of my little family secret, which you may as well keep to yourself. The mother being submerged, nothing more need

be said of *her*. If you are questioned for 'further particulars,' inquire of

"Yours truly,

"R. M.

"The boy has been named 'Keith.' A copy of his baptismal register and that of his birth is enclosed, all in 'regular form,' as you are such a prig."

It cannot be said that either the tone or the substance of the epistle was calculated to increase James Moray's esteem for his half-brother; but to his lonely and saddened life the child came as a Heaven-sent gift. The little Keith was a shy, sensitive boy, who seemed to have been quite unaccustomed to kindness, and he soon repaid his uncle's affection with an ardour of grateful love that poured a flood of sunshine into the secluded home. In a few weeks Mr. Moray wrote to Raymond, offering to bring

up his son as his own heir, provided that all the rights and authority of a father were unconditionally transferred to him. Captain Moray was but too glad to assent to this arrangement, and thenceforth took no notice of either his boy or his brother, and, being killed not long afterwards in a skirmish with a rebel tribe, Keith became the undisputed possession of his English relative.

Day by day, year by year, the bond between the boy and the invalid grew closer and tenderer, until, when Keith was about twelve, a circumstance occurred which not only riveted that bond as nothing else could have done, but permanently influenced his character and modes of thought and feeling.

The only fault in him which caused grave anxiety to Mr. Moray was the ungovernable fury to which he would occasionally give way. He was not often or easily provoked,

but when offended he lost for the time all power of self-restraint, and was capable in his frenzy of excesses which, for days afterwards, he would passionately regret and deplore. He had been annoyed one day by the insolence of a young page-boy, whom Mr. Moray had lately taken into his service, and who had refused to obey some order that Keith had given him. Hoping to arrest the tide of passion that he saw was rising, the uncle commanded the page to leave the room ; but as he obeyed, before he closed the door, he made an insulting grimace at his young master, who instantly darted after him, and a free fight ensued on the landing. Mr. Moray hurried out to part the combatants, who were pretty well matched in size and age, but Keith was the more energetic of the two. He had thrown his adversary to the ground, and might, in his fury, have seriously injured

him, though boys seldom do lasting harm to each other in their battles ; but he was more like a tiger-cub at that moment than a human being. When Mr. Moray went to rescue his prey from his clutches, he aimed a furious kick at him. In stepping backwards to avoid this practical amenity, the invalid lost his balance, and fell to the bottom of the stairs, where he lay senseless, and, as the horrified Keith believed, lifeless. He recovered consciousness after some hours, but chronic ill health is not improved by the sufferer being kicked downstairs. For many weeks he lay between life and death, having received, the doctors said, an internal injury which would render him for ever unable to leave his couch for more than a few hours at most. For some time Keith was not permitted to enter his room, but he could not be prevented from watching outside the door, night and day, like a dog ;

and such was his agony of grief and remorse that when the doctors pronounced Mr. Moray out of danger, their anxiety for him seemed likely to be transferred to his assailant. But Mr. Moray found a way of turning all this pain and sorrow into lasting profit.

“Keith, dear boy,” he said to him one day, when he had been passionately bewailing the injury he had done to his benefactor and dearest friend—“Keith, whatever be the wrong you accuse yourself of towards me, you can more than repair it—you can make of it a joy and a blessing to me, if you are capable of a great and persistent effort, and willing to make it for my sake.”

“I am capable of any effort,” answered the boy, fixing his dark eyes on the speaker, with all the fire of his nature glowing in an intensity of resolve. “I would die a

thousand deaths in making it, to lessen your pain for a day."

"I ask you not to die, my Keith," rejoined his uncle, "but to live worthily, by learning to practise a resolute self-restraint in everything, till you have subdued the brute passion which will otherwise conquer and degrade the manhood in you, until even your noblest aspirations become the mere fitful impulse of the hour. It will be a hard fight, my son, and possibly a lifelong one. Will you engage in the struggle for love of me?"

The boy did not speak, but he knelt down beside the sufferer's couch, and laid his brow against his head; and when he rose to his feet again, Mr. Moray knew that a vow was registered that would never be broken, and though the battle might sometimes go against him, he would never yield nor fly.

Nor did he. He was human and young,

and might, under sudden temptation, sometimes falter, but one glance at the beloved form lying in patient endurance on its couch of anguish, or even the memory of it, would suffice to nerve him to renewed effort to curb his passion, and to keep unfailing watch over himself, until he had gained so resolute a self-mastery that few of his associates even suspected what it cost him to maintain it. And as the man grew feebler and more suffering, the boy stronger, more beautiful, more manly, the relation between them was more like that of mother and son than of uncle and nephew ; and to his need of tenderness and sympathy, Keith's character owed much of the almost feminine softness which tempered its masculine energy in a home where there was no female influence to mould it.

Wise with the truest wisdom of unselfish love, Mr. Moray felt that the seclusion

which was unavoidable for himself would be to the last degree injurious to a youth who would have a place to fill among the activities of the world. So Keith passed through the usual *curriculum* of well-born and wealthy lads, and passed, too, with credit and honour from Rugby to Oxford, always returning from the scenes of his boyish sports or manlier triumphs to bring the freshness of joyous healthy youth into the quiet chamber of the sickly student at Hurstleigh, who never failed to welcome him with loving, indulgent sympathy and counsel. Although he rarely quitted his uncle's home for more than a few days, he was frequently surrounded by young men of his own age—old schoolfellows or college friends—who were invited, at Mr. Moray's express wish, to share his open-air amusements, fishing, hunting, or shooting. But his chief companion and closest friend was Harry Stan-

forth, the young man whom Genevra had seen in his company at the railway station. They had been friends from their earliest school-days, although Harry was two years younger than Keith. He was the son of an officer who had died on his way out to India, and the second marriage of his mother had left him for some years practically an orphan, as his stepfather, while charging himself with his liberal education and maintenance, had declined any personal intercourse, not from unkindness, but because, as he passed his time in foreign travels for the benefit of his health, a young child would at first have been an “encumbrance” in every sense, and would later have been injured, rather than advantaged, by sharing his parent’s roving life.

Possibly it was this shadowy bond of sympathy that at first attracted Keith Moray

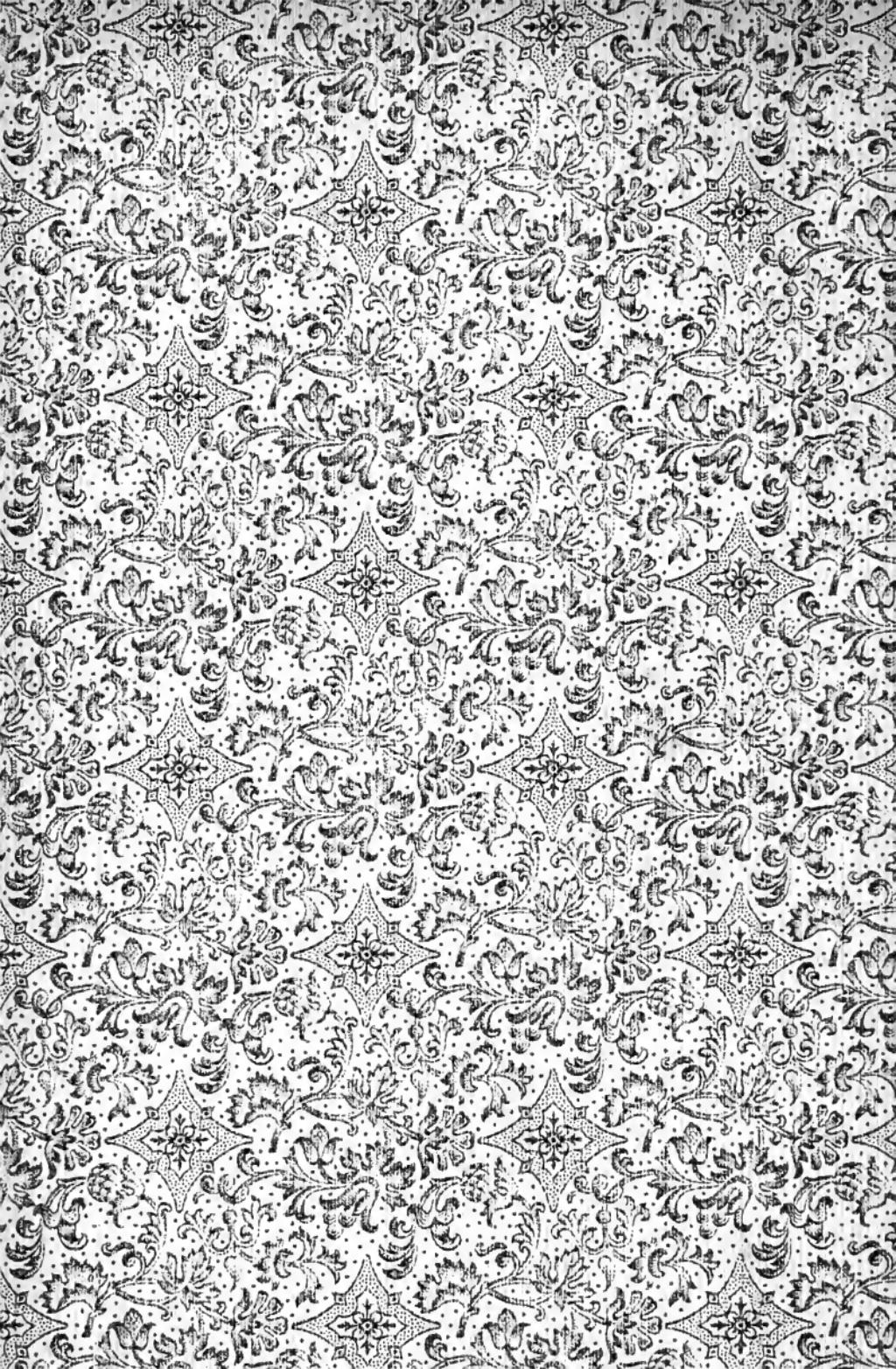
to his young schoolmate, and induced him to take him back with him to Hurstleigh to spend his lonely holidays. But from that time forth the boys grew up like brothers, although totally unlike in tastes, character, and disposition. Hurstleigh was Harry Stanforth's home for years, and seemed likely to remain so even longer, when the return of his mother to England, once more a widow, had renewed their long-suspended relations, and from a lonely orphan he had been summoned to take the position of only son and heir. On the day Jenny saw him at the station, he had been about to escort Lady Dalton to a friend's house for a short visit, which he had not been invited to share ; and, having left her there, he rejoined Keith Moray at Hurstleigh about a fortnight later, as warmly received by the uncle as the nephew. For although Harry Stanforth possessed no personal beauty, nor any re-

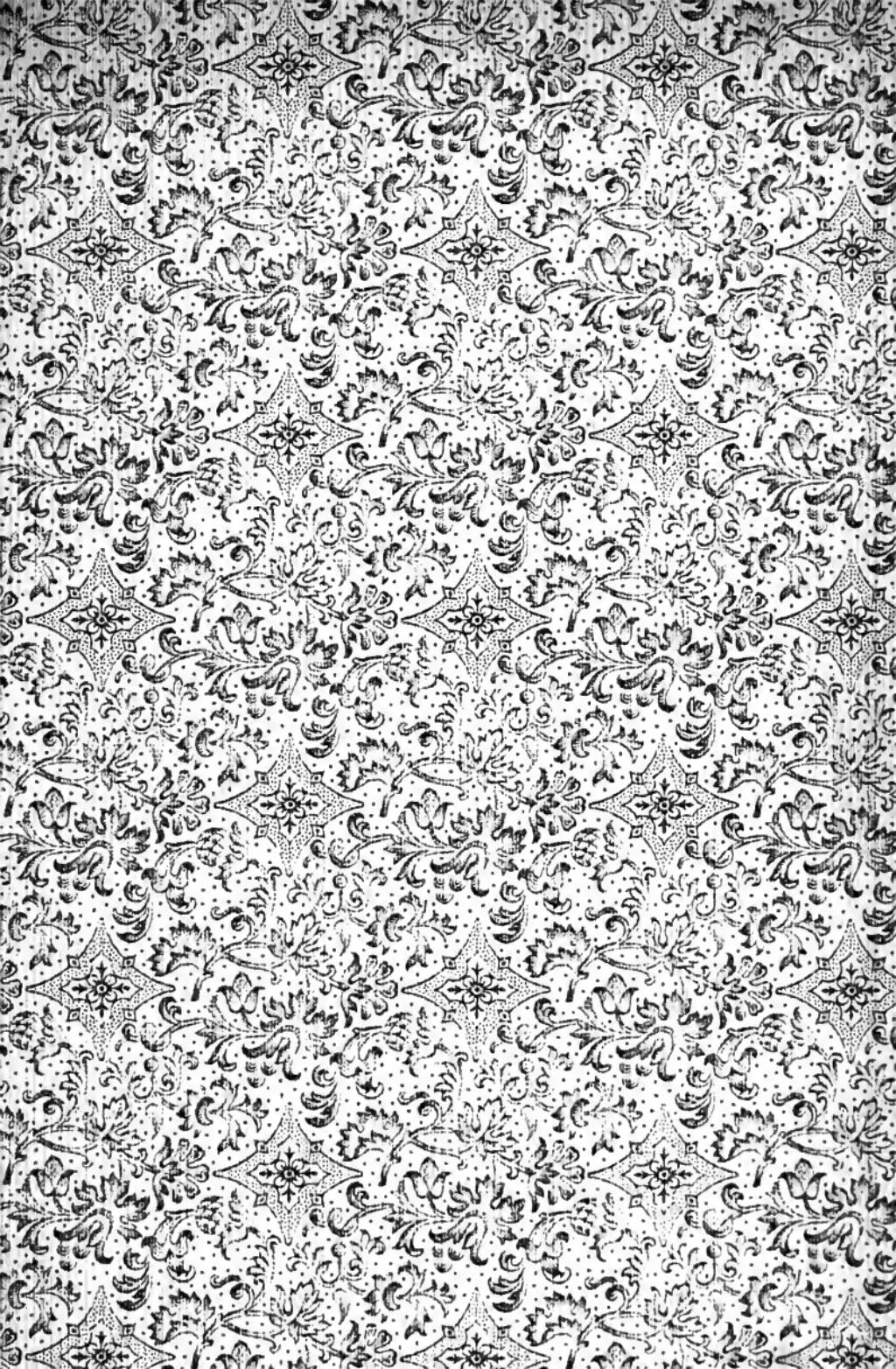
finement of manner and intellect, he was so full of life and unfailing vivacity, so generous and warmhearted, so ready with admiration and sympathy and cordial help whenever needed, that he was universally beloved and everywhere gladly welcomed.

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